

# The Interwar Suburbs of North West London: Planning for Regeneration

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## **Abstract**

Recent UK planning policy has concentrated on regenerating inner cities. For the past thirty years, the interwar suburbs of North West London have seen a changing population, rising levels of deprivation and a deteriorating built environment. Exploring these changes and the role of local centres as foci for regeneration and revitalisation, twelve centres are investigated and their suitability for development assessed in the context of the draft Spatial Development Strategy for London. A new approach to suburban planning is proposed linking the changing condition of centres and the character of the surrounding neighbourhoods to develop more effective sub-regional planning policies.

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures	8
Abbreviations	10
Chapter	
1. Introduction	12
2. Methodology	16
3. The Early Years	22
3.1 Transport for the Masses	22
3.2 Development of the Steam Railway	23
3.3 The Origins of Metro-land	23
3.4 The Development of London Transport Passenger Board	28
3.5 The Tudor Walters Report & the Garden City Movement	30
3.6 Fiscal Policies and the Rise of the Building Societies	32
3.7 The Role of the Speculative Builder	33
3.8 The Role of Planning	38
3.9 The Consumer Society	41
4. Post War Metro-land	
4.1 The Path to Reform	45
4.2 Post War Policy Change	47
4.3 New Towns Policy	48
4.4 The Fifties Boom	48
4.5 Estate Completion	49
4.6 Infill Housing	49
4.7 Redevelopment of Larger Sites	49
4.8 The Growing Role of the Public Sector	50
4.9 Chalk Hill Estate, Wembley	51
4.10 From the Sixties to the Nineties	53
4.11 Changes in Employment	53
4.12 Government Housing Policy	55
4.13 Car Dependency	55
4.14 Conclusion	56



5.	Population	
5.1	Introduction and Data Sources	57
5.2	Population Change	57
5.3	Migration	59
5.4	Policy Implications	62
6.	Housing	
6.1	Introduction	66
6.2	Chapter Framework	66
6.3	Econ. Forces, Population Change & Household Formation	67
6.4	Problems and Affordability	70
6.5	Accessibility	72
6.6	The Quality of the Stock	73
6.7	Suitability of Housing	75
6.8	Investment	78
6.9	Government Policy	79
6.10	Perceptions	80
6.11	Housing and Regeneration	80
7.	Deprivation	
7.1	Introduction	82
7.2	The Shape of Deprivation	82
7.3	Deprivation Indices and Their Limitations	84
7.4	Deprivation Indices and Regeneration	86
7.5	Deprivation Indices and Area Exclusion	86
7.6	Deprivation Indices and Housing Regeneration	87
7.7	Deprivation Indices and Private Investment	88
7.8	Conclusion	89
8.	Town Centres	
8.1	Introduction	90
8.2	Town Centres and Change	91

8.3	Arguments Against Suburban Town Centre Regeneration	94
8.4	District and Local Centres	97
8.5	Regeneration and Revitalisation	98
8.6	Regeneration Foci at the Local Level	98
8.7	Regeneration Foci at the Neighbourhood Level	99
8.8	Regeneration at the Regional/Network Level	100
8.9	Government Policy and Suburban Regeneration	100
9.	Town Centre Survey	
9.1	Introduction to Research	102
9.2	Current Policy Aims and Latest Research	102
9.3	Elements of Primary Research	103
9.4	Aim, Objectives and Methodology	104
9.5	Wembley Central	106
9.6	Kingsbury	112
9.7	Preston Road	116
9.8	Kenton	120
9.9	South Harrow	124
9.10	Wealdstone	127
9.11	Rayners Lane	131
9.12	Belmont	135
9.13	Pinner	138
9.14	Eastcote	142
9.15	Ruislip Manor	145
9.16	Ruislip	148
9.17	Conclusion	151
10.	Analysis of Town Centre Survey	
10.1	Condition of the Centres	152
10.2	Study Centres and Deprivation	153
10.3	Triggers of Change	154
10.4	Regeneration Successes and Failures	156

10.5 Planning Policy Implications for Suburban Regeneration	158
10.6 Conclusion	158
11. Towards a New Approach to Suburban Planning	
11.1 Introduction	160
11.2 The Suburbs and the Draft SDS	160
11.3 The Relation of Centres with Neighbourhoods	160
11.4 Urbanism and Rurality	161
11.5 Linking Suburban Character and Centre Condition	161
11.6 Centre Changes and Time	163
12. Conclusions	
12.1 Hypothesis Result	164
12.2 Current Situation	165
12.3 Towards a new approach	166
Bibliography	169
Appendices	
Appendix 1 Estate Agent Survey	186
Appendix 2 Questionnaire for Professionals	190

## **List of Figures**

2.1 Abercrombie's Four Rings	17
2.2 North West London	20
3.1 The Railways and Built Up London in 1900	24
3.2 Cecil Park Estate, Pinner @1890 and 2002	25
3.3 Metro-land	27
3.4 Costin Advertising, 1923	35
3.5 Rural Middlesex, 1929 & Harrow Garden Village, 1931	36
3.6 Soutar Scheme for Ruislip Manor	39
4.1 1960s Infill Housing, Pinner	51
4.2 1950s Headstone Lane	51
4.3 1960s Chalkhill	52
4.4 2002 Chalkhill	52
5.1 Population of North West London Boroughs During the Past Century	58
5.2 Natural Increase in North West London 1998	59
5.3 Population Change Components 1996-8	59
6.1 Historical Development of Housing in Three Phases	61
6.2 Average House Price Change in NW London Suburbs 1997-2001	71
7.1 Most Deprived Wards in North West London (2000)	83
9.1 Wembley Central SWOT Analysis	107
9.2 Land-Use Analysis Key	108
9.3 Wembley Central Land-Use Map	109
9.4 Kingsbury SWOT Analysis	113
9.5 Kingsbury Land-Use Map	114
9.6 Preston Road SWOT Analysis	117
9.7 Preston Road Land-Use Map	118
9.8 Kenton SWOT Analysis	121
9.9 Kenton Land-Use Map	122
9.10 South Harrow SWOT Analysis	125
9.11 South Harrow Land-Use Map	126
9.12 Wealdstone SWOT Analysis	128
9.13 Wealdstone Land-Use Map	129

9.14 Rayners Lane SWOT Analysis	132
9.15 Rayners Lane Land-Use Map	133
9.16 Belmont SWOT Analysis	136
9.17 Belmont Land-Use Map	137
9.18 Pinner SWOT Analysis	139
9.19 Pinner Land-Use Map	140
9.20 Eastcote SWOT Analysis	143
9.21 Eastcote Land-Use Map	144
9.22 Ruislip Manor SWOT Analysis	146
9.23 Ruislip Manor Land-Use Map	147
9.24 Ruislip SWOT Analysis	149
9.25 Ruislip Land-Use Map	150
11.1 A New Look at Changing Suburbia	161

## Abbreviations

CASA	Centre for Advanced Statistical Analysis
DoE	Department of the Environment
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DTLR	Department of Transport and Local Government
GDA	Greater London Development Agency
GLA	Greater London Authority
GOL	Government Office for London
ID2000	Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000
IEFR	Institute of Environmental and Family Research
LDA	London Development Agency
LEA	Local Education Authority
LCC	London County Council
LMA	London Metropolitan Archive
LPAC	London Planning Advisory Council
LPTB	London Passenger Transport Board
LRC	London Research Centre
MARS	The Modern Architectural Research Society
MCC	Middlesex County Council
MOL	Metropolitan Open Land
MRCE	Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd
MSLC	Metropolitan Surplus Land Committee
NIMBY	Not-In-My-Backyard
NWL	North West London
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
RSLS	Registered Social Landlords
RTPI	Royal Town Planning Institute
SDS	Spatial Development Strategy
SPA	Spatial Planning Advice Ltd
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget

SWOT	Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats
The Met	The Metropolitan Railway
TCPA	The Town and Country Planning Association
UCL	University College London
UDP	Unitary Development Plan
UERL	Underground Electric Railways of London
URBED	The Urban and Economic Development Group

Child of the First War, Forgotten by the Second, We call you Metro-land, We laid our schemes lured by the lush brochure, down byways beckoned, to build at last the cottage of our dreams, a city clerk turned countryman again linked to the Metropolis by train.' John Betjeman, 1974.

'The city that faces up to the future must have some sense of its destiny, some sense of looking beyond expediency. Yet it is hard to reconcile these qualities with the everyday realities. What marks out the successful city is a sense of the possible.' Deyan Sudjic, 1992 p.103.

## **1. Introduction**

The London interwar suburbs have consistently suffered a tirade of critical disapproval. As the suburbs were being built, contemporary writers such as Clough Williams-Ellis (1928) and Osbert Lancaster (1938 and 1959) savaged the architecture, the destruction of large swathes of countryside and the submersion of small villages into a continuous urban form. They feared the draining effect suburbanization would have on city centres in terms of population and job losses and the impact this would have on the lives of the people left behind. However they often saved their most scathing attacks for the new inhabitants of the suburbs and their lifestyles. Thomas Sharp (1936) referred to these early pioneers as; 'An unorganised band of prisoners breaking gaol with no very definite plans for what lies before them.' Other writers attacked suburbanites purely on class grounds for being a petite bourgeoisie, condemning their individualism and conspicuous consumption.

One of the consequences of this critical view has been the prolonged neglect of the suburb as an issue for town planning. Indeed since the 1980s, the emergence of the post Fordist global environment, moves away



from Keynesian Welfare economics and arrival of 'place marketing', has had a profound effect on planning in cities (See Porter, 1970, Lipietz, 1992 and Krugman, 1995). By concentrating on spatial development policies which emphasise the linkage of economic and social forces to improve the quality of urban landscapes, regeneration has become an essential tool in attracting global investment. As a result, attempts to improve cities by rejuvenating disused docks, sites of defunct industries and problematic housing estates have generally emphasised city cores and their immediate vicinities (See Loftman and Nevin, 1995 and Griffiths in Oatley, 1998 pp. 41-57).

This has had two effects on the interwar suburbs of London. First the polarization of inward investment in favour of the city cores at the expense of the aging inner suburbs amounts to a failure of policy to present citywide town planning. Although the draft Spatial Development Strategy for London (GLA, 2002c) is intended for the whole of London, the only specific plans for the suburbs is a polycentric policy which aims to develop key transport hubs, as locations for more concentrated development. By adopting such an approach, the draft SDS fails to maximise the contribution such centres can provide as foci for neighbourhood regeneration. It also ignores all the other centres across suburban London and makes only minor reference to residential heartlands. Furthermore the draft SDS makes no specific reference to deprivation in the suburbs and in consequence fails to meet head on the growing problem of pocket deprivation and its role in suburban decline.

The second effect of current planning/regeneration policies is that these cater very well for property led business investment but fail to provide sufficient quality affordable housing for residents. Much of the accommodation being provided in Central London regeneration areas consists of one or two bedroom apartments. Although this helps to meet the growing requirement of providing more accommodation for one or two

person small households in the Capital, it has been accompanied by a growing element of gentrification and dislocation of the original residents. This, in its most rudimentary form, creates a cycle of invasion, dislocation, and outward migration in the search for affordable accommodation. Not only does this have a detrimental effect on individuals but it can also have a devastating effect on households with children. Economic forced housing migration disrupts family networking resulting in greater dependency on public and private sector resources in childcare. This can also be seen in caring for the elderly, sick and disabled. The result for some suburbs is rising levels of deprivation equal to some of the worst inner city estates.

Whereas city centres have benefited from inward investment, investment in the inner suburbs, with the exception of a few predominantly major centres, has been comparatively weak. However the same forces that have been causing change in the centres are having similar impacts in the suburbs. Indeed since the interwar suburbs were built they have been undergoing major social, economic and environmental changes especially over the past thirty years. A number of these changes can be attributed to changes in population and the size and numbers of households. Others can be attributed to global economic changes, industrial restructuring and developments in the retail and leisure sectors. Similarly, societal changes in attitudes towards community and individualism, consumerism, property ownership, the changing roles of men and women have all played their role in shaping the suburbs.

One particular issue that is starting to emerge is the decline of the twenties and thirties suburbs close to the centre of London. Over the past twenty years many areas adjacent to the North and South Circular roads in London have begun to develop significant increases in levels of deprivation amongst their populations. Poor living conditions, rising crime, poor health and low education levels are more reminiscent of classic 'problem' areas of the inner city areas than the prosperous leafy suburban image demeaned by critics.

On the one hand this can be attributed to concentrations of capital investment but equally significantly as Peter Hall commented in 1989, p.20: 'The suburbs will not last forever. In the late 1980s they are between 50 and 70 years old. Not all were well built; not all have been well maintained. The cost of maintaining them will surely rise, and their owners will not be able to meet it. Some may well degenerate into slums, and the question of clearance and rebuilding will then loom large.'

The hypothesis for this thesis is that 'Planning continues to fail the suburbs.' It is explored through an area-based study of North West London investigating the historical and current attitudes of planning as they evolved with the growth of the public transport network (in particular the Metropolitan Railway) and the work of speculative builders. It examines the urban containment policies of the post war period, the industrial relocation and new towns policy and the changing expectations of the population. It investigates the changing demography and some of the political developments which have undermined some suburban areas. It investigates the patterns of deprivation and the way they currently weaken suburban regeneration and revitalization attempts.

A key component of the thesis is an analysis and assessment of twelve local and district centres considering how they have been coping with the economic and social changes of the past twenty years and how planning has been comparatively ineffective. The thesis examines current regeneration policies and in particular the draft SDS and how it effects NWL. The paper will then consider a new look at planning in the suburbs and make a number of conclusions and recommendations.

## **2. Methodology**

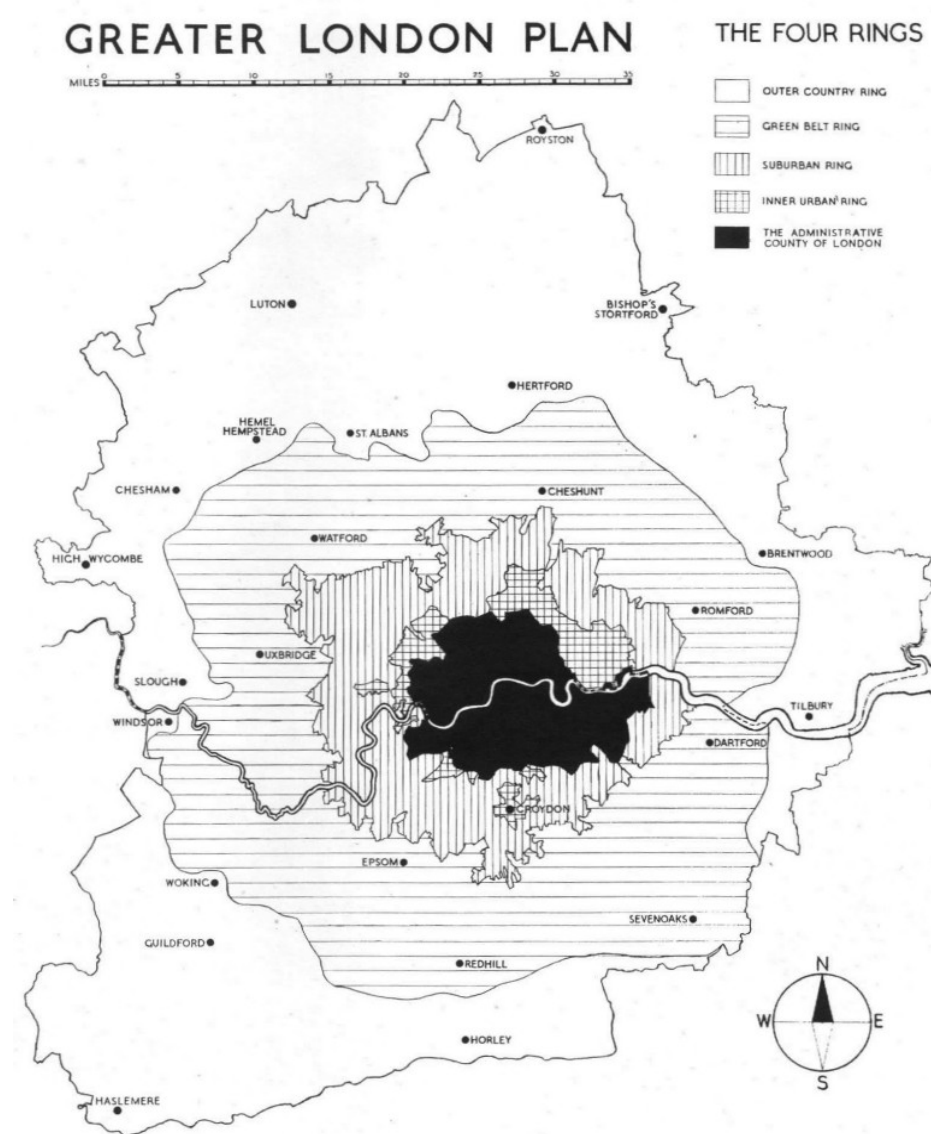
This thesis is a mixed, area-based, study focusing on the suburban ring of NWL. Its overall aims are to test the hypothesis 'Planning continues to fail the suburbs' and to explore ways which will enable planning to bring the benefits of the urban renaissance to suburbia whilst at the same time providing suburbia with a more clearly defined city-wide strategy.

Geographically the thesis will adopt Abercrombie's 1944 London Plan's Suburban Ring (Figure 2.1) and will in the main focus on the London Boroughs of Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon. Although there is evidence of earlier Edwardian and Victorian development around the older villages and transport routes, it is the 'semi-detached' environment built in the twenties and thirties which forms the leading focus for this research.

This thesis is based on four forms of research. The first is desk bound investigation based on original works, government and local authority documents and official statistics available in both printed and/or digital form. The second form is based on a comprehensive field investigation of the current land-use, condition and policy initiatives of twelve centres in NWL. The third form of research is a questionnaire of local estate agents on the expanding buy-to-rent sector and the fourth is based on a series of interviews with practitioners and experts in the planning, regeneration and retail fields.

It is considered that before being able to find solutions to today's problems it is first necessary to understand why and how these suburbs took on their current form. Through developing an understanding of these forces a better comprehension of the intricacies of today's issues can be more fully appreciated and as a result can be used as a tool to bring about fundamental change.

Figure 2.1 Abercrombie's Four Rings, 1944 p.23.



It should be noted at this point that although there have been attempts to look at the transport, housing, economic and social changes of the suburbs of NWL relatively little work has been done to explore the inter relationship of these themes in the context of planning history. In attempting to bridge this shortfall of knowledge chapter three of this thesis explores the planning history of the suburbs of NWL as they developed along the Metropolitan Railway and other public transport routes up to the Second World War. In

particular chapter three looks at the growth and form of the housing estates, the emergence of suburban town centres, employment locations, the forces driving the changes and the implications for early town planning policy. Chapter four continues the history by looking at the post war changes from the time when urban containment policies brought a halt to London's outward expansion through to the present. The chapter explores the changes in planning policy, local government and population and the implications for development in NWL. Throughout chapters three and four, changes in attitudes, market forces and government policy are explored.

Chapter five looks at the recent impact the growing and changing population is having in NWL. With the Government following a series of compact city policies, as demonstrated by the recent Urban White Paper and PPG3, the draft SDS has many similar policies including the aim of maintaining London's growing population within its current borders without encroaching on London's green spaces (GLA, 2002c p.4 para.17). This is considered fundamental when exploring suburban regeneration and the types of pressure this will exert on land-use. Chapter five looks at the demography of NWL in terms of the migration patterns in and out of the area, ethnic diversification and the impact this is having on different communities within the area. In view of the absence of recent census data, some of the information for this section has been drawn from education and national health registers.

With the population factors analysed, chapter six explores the current housing situation in NWL and the effect this is having on the area. Much of the data is based on recent housing surveys carried out by the local boroughs and longer-term research originated by the London Research Centre/London Development Agency. The chapter examines the growth of the suburban housing in terms of economic theory, the problems of high housing costs and overcrowding. In particular, the chapter reports on the condition of local housing, the effects of estate refurbishment and the

growing phenomenon of 'property rich cash poor' homeowners. The chapter introduces the issues associated with the private rental sector and analyses the government and local housing and planning policies and their effect in terms of suburban regeneration and revitalisation.

In order to understand why the suburbs need to benefit from regeneration initiatives chapter seven looks at the emerging pattern of deprivation in NWL as shown by the multiple deprivation indices (2000). The chapter critically investigates the way current indicators are constructed, including both the type of indicators which have been omitted and the way the indices are ward based. It is considered that these two factors combine to create a false impression that the suburbs have only very low levels of deprivation. The failure to identify and monitor pocket deprivation is seen as a fundamental flaw in the current system. In terms of suburban regeneration the earlier allocation of resources at the local level is seen as a more economic means to prevent deprivation spreading into other neighbourhoods.

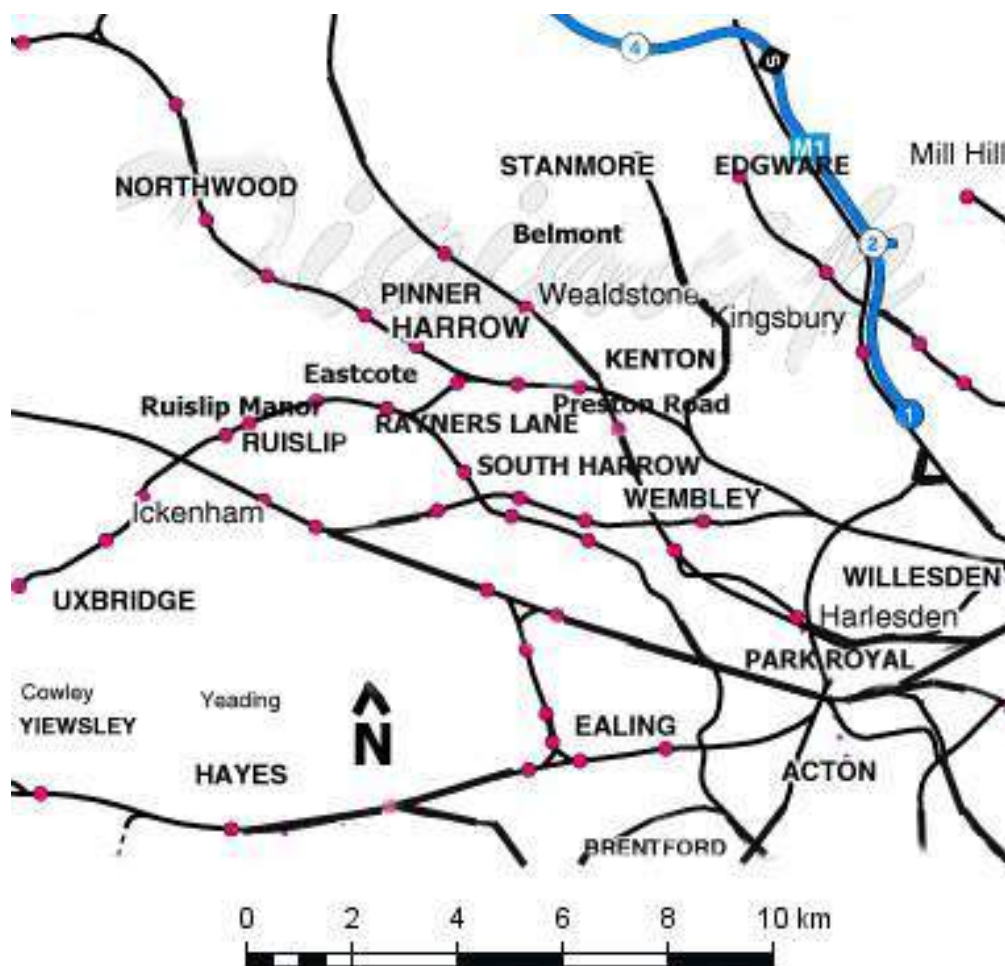
Chapter eight examines the issue of using suburban town centres as foci for regeneration. This is based on the unique identity such places can provide in cities for the local population.

This concept is further developed in chapter nine, with a survey of twelve selected district and local centres in NWL (Figure 2.2). Using a combination of tools including Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunity and Threat Analysis (SWOT), photographs, a field study of the current land usage, mapped out digitally for each centre, and a survey of the expanding private rental sector, their current condition is assessed and their suitability for regeneration and revitalisation considered.

Chapter ten analyses the findings of the town centre survey by investigating five central themes The first relates to the current condition of the centres,

the second sees if higher deprivation levels are rippling out from Inner London or whether pocket deprivation is expanding. The third theme investigates the triggers of decline and the fourth investigates useful devices which could lead to improvements. The final theme analyses the implications for planning policy in terms of using the centres as growth points to help accommodate London's growing population and economy.

Fig. 2.2 North West London



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

Using the earlier evidence, chapter eleven begins suggests a new approach for looking at planning for regeneration in the suburbs and suggests a possible model that may help in future decision making.



Chapter twelve brings together the different threads of the research. It states the findings and makes two sets of suggestions, one for future planning policy for regeneration and revitalisation of the suburbs and a second for future research areas.

Using this mixed approach it is possible to test the basic hypothesis that 'Planning continues to fail the suburbs'. Moreover, it will provide the means to fulfil the primary aim of the thesis of enabling town planning to adopt a more sympathetic approach to suburban regeneration and revitalisation thereby extending the benefits of the urban renaissance to suburbanites within a more clearly defined city-wide strategy.

### **3. The Early Years**

In order to fully appreciate today's issues it is considered important first to establish an understanding of how the interwar suburbs of North West London (NWL) were developed and why they took the resultant form. Broadly speaking these suburbs were the result of five primary factors; the development of a mass public transport system, the Tudor Walters Report, changes in fiscal policy and expansion of the building societies, the role of the speculative builder and the emergence of a consumer society. The interaction of these five forces was to create the semi-detached world of the interwar suburb. By understanding these early linkages and subsequent changes, a more effective holistic planning approach can be devised.

Historically the suburbs were places where farming and polluting industries were located. Only the wealthy could afford to have a retreat in the more attractive areas such as Hampstead. However from the moment the Euston to Birmingham Railway was opened in 1837 the outlying villages of Willesden, Wembley and Harrow were destined to become integrated into the growing metropolis.

#### **3.1 Transport for the Masses**

The growth of the interwar suburbs is inextricably linked to the inventiveness of the Victorian and Edwardian transport pioneers. There are three distinct phases of innovation; first the development of the over ground steam railways, second the actions of the Metropolitan Railway and third the evolution of the Underground Electric Railways of London (UERL) into the London Transport Passenger Board (LTPB) in 1933. Innovation in this context is not restricted to purely technological developments. The innovations in transport, which helped to lay the foundations for the suburbs, are subtler but at the same time more profound.

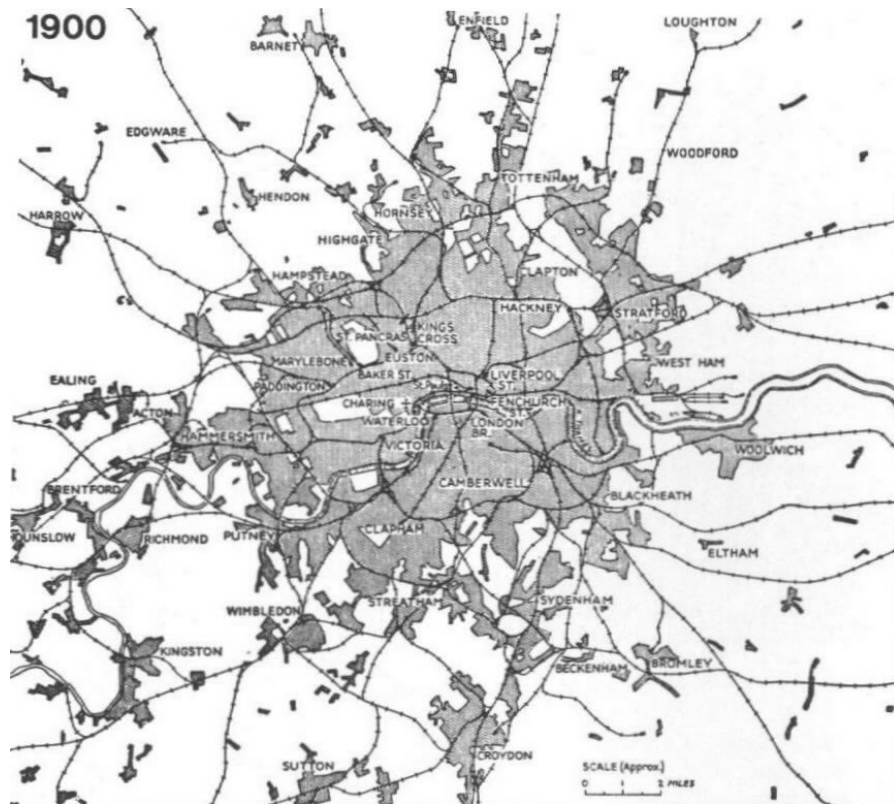
### 3.2 Development of the Steam Railways

One of the most significant innovations occurred in 1862 when the Great Eastern Railway was forced by Act of Parliament to provide half price fare trains for workers. Although these trains only just broke even, their growing popularity encouraged the expansion of the services. Soon workmen's trains were running on the Great Northern and Metropolitan District Railways. Ironically the majority of commuters who used these pre-eight am services were members of the growing white-collar workforce. They were the first pioneers prepared to travel daily beyond the 'walking' settlements of Islington and Camden. Their 'reward' was to live in the new byelaw housing built by the speculative house builders of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. These estates tended to be concentrated along the new routes to the east and north of The City (Figure 3.1). To the West the construction of the Great Western Railway and later Tram routes along the Uxbridge Road linked Acton, Ealing and Greenford directly to the West End and City. However in NWL, it was the Metropolitan Railway, which was to have the greatest impact.

### 3.3 The Origins of Metro-land

Many of the pioneer investors in the London Public Transport System originated from the United States such as Charles Tyson Yerkes (See Hall, 1996 and Barker and Robbins, 1974 for further discussion). American railroad companies had been highly innovative and subsequently rich by developing real estate interests along their routes as a way to improve passenger and freight revenues. In Victorian Britain railway companies were prevented from developing property interests by their licences issued under Act of Parliament through the 1845 Land Clauses Consolidation Act (Biddle, 1990 pp. 107-8). However the construction of the World's first underground railway by the Metropolitan Railway between Paddington and The City during the 1850's using the cut and cover method had had a significant detrimental impact on London's built environment and local amenities.

Figure 3.1 The Railways and Built Up London in 1900 (Barker, 1990 p.45)



As a result, the Metropolitan Railway had to purchase large amounts of neighbouring land. Thus when the Metropolitan Railway Board sought to expand the service northwestwards through the Hampstead Hills, they were able to persuade Parliament to include a Section 14 in the Metropolitan Railway Act (1862), which allowed the company 'To grant building leases of lands which they have purchased but not for the purposes of the Railway.' The Metropolitan Railway Act of 1868 placed the company in the unique position as compared with other railway companies of being able to buy land by agreement 'beyond the limits of deviation shown on any deposit plans relating to the railway.' Consequently from 1879 the Met began to develop a building estate at Willesden Green (Jackson, 1986 pp. 140-2).

However, according to Hayward, 1997 pp.53, the Met's special powers were significantly strengthened by Section 39 of the Metropolitan Railway Act of

1885 when the company was empowered to; 'Separate the surplus lands of the Company and the rents and profits thereof on the one hand from the revenues arising from the working and use of the railway stations on the other hand.' This gave the green light to the Met's Board to establish the Metropolitan Surplus Lands Committee (MSLC) in 1885 with the objective of developing land adjacent to the new railway line. These rights were further strengthened in 1887 when The Met, through R.W. Perks, skilfully persuaded The Royal Commission on London Traffic to recommend the confirmation of their development powers in the Metropolitan Railway Act (Hayward, 1997 p.54).

However, the Met's role as land developer in suburbia could have been very limited. Like other railway companies they were coming under increased competition from the developing tram and omnibus services in the inner core. These developing networks offered a cheaper, cleaner, more frequent service. Appreciating the high commuter costs, the Met was keen to attract an upmarket clientele. Consequently the first developments for the MSLC was the Cecil Park Estate in Pinner in 1885 (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Cecil Park Estate, Pinner @1890 and 2002.



Designed and constructed along similar lines to Bedford Park (1870) in West London, the estate offered substantial up-market villa style housing to professionals and senior managers who could afford the daily first class fares to the City. Indeed the cost of the fares for these outlying areas was beyond the scope of most workers.

Although there was a steady growth in demand for housing in NWL, estate development was slow. This was partly due to the lack of interest in owner occupation, lack of mortgage funding and volume of alternative housing closer to the centre. Equally significant was the attitude of a number of the Met's directors including the chairman at the time, Edward Watkins, who strongly resisted further attempts to diversify the company into the estate development market, preferring instead to concentrate on developing the line to Manchester and Paris.

The completion in 1904 of the Metropolitan's Harrow and Uxbridge Railway was ultimately to signal a radical change in the Met directors' attitude. Indeed at the official opening Lord Aberconway, the new Chairman of the Met commented; "Some of those present here today would no doubt live to see the districts through which the new line passes develop and furnish homes for London's ever expanding population." (Edwards and Pigram, 1985 p.11). Electrification the following year was later to allow significant improvements in train frequencies and journey times.

Two years later in 1906, The Met converted Edward Watkins's failed 1898 Tower Company into the Wembley Park Estate Company. With six railway lines in the vicinity leading to Central London and a comparative lack of estate development, the 280-acre estate owned by the company appeared a good investment (Jackson, 1991 pp. 15-17). In 1912 Robert H. Selbie, General Manager, pointed out the need to establish a separate property development company to meet the shortfall in the supply of housing for rent of between £41 and £100 per annum (LMA MET 10/322, 31.12.12).

This he argued would provide a better return for the Met through increased revenue from the estates and increased levels of passenger traffic. Fearing the actions of developers he actively developed interests in a number of neighbouring estates. However an active policy of suburban development by The Met was not a forgone conclusion. It would be another seven years before the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd (MRCE) was formed (Edwards and Pigram, 1985 p.12).

In the meantime the innovative Selbie developed the excursion market to rural Middlesex. In 1915 'Metro-land' was launched (Figure 3.3) (LMA MET 1/27, 29.4.15). A more sophisticated publication than its 1904 predecessor, 'The Annual Guide to the Extension Line'; it included colour plates (A rarity at that time), a guide to the rural Arcadia and advertisements for new developments.

Figure 3.3 Metro-land (Source Steam On the Met Brochure, 1992)



Selbie wanted the publication to encourage visitors to eventually become Met commuters, (Ward, S. 1998 pp. 96-103). By working with local estate developers and learning their marketing and professional skills, he developed a highly effective device which was to make a fundamental

contribution to the expansion of the suburbia in NWL. Soldiers fighting in the trenches, such as the poet George R. Sims, began to dream of a "land where all your troubles cease – Metro-land." In many respects, the use of idealised 'Olde' England images in this pamphlet provided a hope of a brighter future for many Londoners at a time when the world was in a state of upheaval. By exploiting and combining a mythical comfortable view of the past and the aspirational desire of becoming a homeowner, the Met was providing the means to a new way of life for many. In London, the 'Live in Metro-land' slogan acted as a rallying call for change.

Finally in 1919, the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd was formed, probably the most significant innovation in the development of suburban NWL. It would take only twenty years for rural Middlesex to be transformed into suburbia. Indeed twenty years later this innovation and its subsequent impact became subject to investigation by the Barlow Commission when looking into Planning Reform. W.A. Robson (Royal Commission on the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population, 1938) commented that the covering up of London's countryside by thousands of houses was the result of '...the devastating onrush of the speculative builder, aided and abetted in one notorious instance by a railway company turned landowner (*The Metropolitan Railway*).'

### 3.4 Development of the London Transport Passenger Board

However the Met was not unique in terms of developing a suburban commuter market in London. When George Gibb took over the running of Yerkes's UERL in 1905 and brought in Frank Pick and Albert Stanley (Later Lord Ashfield) a new innovative partnership was created which would extend the London Transport Network to its technological limits by the start of the Second World War. In 1912, the UERL took over one of its main rivals, the London General Omnibus Company. Pick introduced Yerkes's original idea of using the bus system as a feeder for the tube network with the slogan 'Where the Railway Ends the Motor Bus begins.' As a result,



according to Barman (1979 p.66), Pick doubled the number of bus routes and extended the service area five fold. This innovative concept was to radically alter the areas where people were prepared to live. No longer were they restricted to areas within the immediate vicinity of major routes. By opening up once inaccessible areas through good transport linkages, the continuous built up area of London was set to expand.

Furthermore Pick calculated the limits the Tube service could reach. By having stations closer together in the centre and wider apart further out, he saw the limit of the Tube network as between a 12 and 15 miles radius based on a 40 minute maximum journey a daily commuter would be prepared to make. Any longer and the time and cost for the average worker would be prohibitive (Pick, 1936 pp. 215-6). His studies showed areas for expansion and he managed to persuade successive governments during the depression to provide zero or minimal interest public works loans to finance developments on the Piccadilly, Northern and Central Lines (Barman, 1979 pp. 147-8).

Moreover, like the Met, Pick developed a very powerful publicity machine in order to make people feel comfortable using the network. By standardizing designs and logos, adoption of the Henry Beck Tube Map in 1933 (Green, 1989 p.4), the impressive architecture of Charles Holden and the use of sophisticated advertising campaigns the London Population was encouraged to travel throughout the capital and beyond (Green and Rewse-Davies, 1995 pp. 113-137). Just as with the Met, the publicity machine of the UERL (which became the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933), by demonstrating the ease and affordability of tube and bus travel, successfully encouraged a new army of commuters to move to the expanding suburbs. Indeed between 1919-1939 20% of Londoners were to move to the new suburbs (Jackson, 1991 pp. 78-9). However there were a number of crucial weaknesses in the way the network had developed which will be returned to later in this chapter.

### 3.5 The Tudor Walters Report and the Garden City Movement

Whereas the combined innovations of the transport network demonstrated the affordability and feasibility of a move to the suburbs, there first had to be a break through in the type of available housing. Since the 1875 Public Health Act local authorities had been given power to adopt bylaws to check the worst features of contemporary building such as dense packing around small courts. During the intervening period the drab, monotonous terraced byelaw housing had come under attack from numerous sources. Ebenezer Howard (1898) and the Garden City Movement began to explore alternative forms of housing provision. However it was the carnage of The Great War coupled with a fear of social unrest at home that galvanised the establishment to rethink official position on housing and embark on an active policy of reform. "If unrest is to be converted into contentment, the provision of good houses may prove one of the most potent agents in that conversion", said King George V in 1919. The 'Homes fit for Heroes' movement and the publication of Captain Richard Reiss's pamphlet 'The Home I Want' in 1918 vocalised the feelings of many returning soldiers. They did not want to return to the old ways of living in slums in polluted, crowded cities. They wanted space and clean air for their families to grow up (See Swenerton, 1981).

In the light of the ensuing debate, the Local Government Board set up a housing committee under the auspices of Liberal MP Sir John Tudor Walters to look at ways to improve the quality of housing after the war for working people. Essentially the committee members were split into two camps. On the one hand were the Garden City group, represented by Raymond Unwin and Frank Baines, who sought a vernacular cottage solution continuing the Arts and Crafts Movement typified by the architectural style of Norman Shaw and Charles Voysey (See Unwin, 1909). On the other were the Liverpool School of Architects led by Patrick Abercrombie and Stanley Adshead who favoured a less fussy neo-Georgian approach to future housing.

When the Report on Housing was published in 1918 it covered four main areas. The first part explored housing policy, administration and the type of house to be built. The second covered site layout, design and the development process. The third discussed the design of the house itself and the fourth section reviewed the cost and availability of materials and possible savings through standardisation and employment of new materials.

The report's main objective was for government to construct 500,000 new homes over five years for working people through public utility societies and local authority housing schemes. As far as speculative builders were concerned the report considered that they 'present a rather more difficult problem, but they most certainly have their place.' Although supplemented by the work of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee, the report was a personal triumph for Raymond Unwin (Hall p.69, 1996). In many respects it was a copy of his earlier works 'Cottage Plans and Common Sense' (1902) and 'Nothing Gained by Overcrowding' (1912). It recommended a low-density approach to housing with between 8 to 12 single-family dwelling houses per acre. Houses would be at least 70' apart to ensure sufficient winter sunshine reached the occupants. Houses would be built in short terraces, each with its own bath, while family homes would have a rear garden. The report went to considerable lengths to explain 'the most important economies in the provision of dwellings depend on the laying out of the sites, including roads, drains, etc.' Alternative low density road and junction treatments were suggested including the development of cul-de-sacs which would also provide safe play areas for children and the elimination of rear access roads. Backland sites were to be used as recreational areas. The appeal of the new suburban living was summed up by Ernest Pretyman, M.P. for Chelmsford who commented; "Houses shall be provided in semi-rural conditions with good garden plots and with good transport access to work in which the man is engaged, so that he can do his work in the factory while his family can live in fresh air and in a properly constructed house and where, when he gets home at night, he will find not

only a healthy family, but healthy occupation outside where they can go and work together in the garden.” (Quoted by Bowdler in Saint, 1999 p.108).

Following the report's acceptance in 1919, the newly formed Ministry of Health under the former Minister of Reconstruction, Christopher Addison, published the recommendations in a 'Housing Manual' in 1920. Although aimed at local authorities, speculative builders were quick to adopt it as the blue print for housing development. The manual used many of Unwin's ideas regarding house design and estate layout. As Edwards (1981 p.106) comments; 'It became an unwritten, unexplained, but universally accepted code of practice'. Indeed the Manual cannot be underestimated when examining the morphology of the interwar suburb and the dominance of a pseudo arts and crafts architectural style.

### 3.6 Fiscal Policies and the Rise of the Building Societies

Even before the First World War there was a serious housing problem. The need to increase manufacturing output with the onset of war increased the demand for housing in the industrial centres. In the free housing market, fixed supply and increased demand generated higher rents. The Government fearing a threat to war production introduced the Rent Restrictions and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act in 1915. All rents were fixed at their pre-war levels. This helped industry but 'pushed government into becoming a major housing provider.' (Ward, S. 1994 pp. 40-41).

Despite the end of war and desire to build 500,00 new homes, structural economic factors threatened the new plans. As Bentley (1994, p.70) comments; "The land available for suburban development - greatly increased through factors like better suburban transport – could not *actually* be developed, however, without changes in the system by which housing was funded." In 1914 only 10-15% of all families were owner-occupiers

(Jackson, 1991 pp. 78-9). Private investment in housing-to-rent declined after the war partly due to fears of government intervention following the Rent Restrictions Act (1915). Higher interest rates and building costs furthermore dissuaded private investors. The situation was further complicated in 1919 when the government initiated a large-scale local authority house-building scheme.

However the economic slump after 1920 helped to reverse the decline in the investment in housing with funding being transferred from stocks and shares into building societies (Boddy, 1980). The societies had largely funded the development of pre-war rented suburbs. The return of the building societies to funding owner-occupation was helped on three fronts. First incomes of wage earners significantly improved, enabling homeowners to make mortgage repayments. This was most noticeable in the London area where there was a large-scale expansion of new light industries and growth of the white-collar worker sectors. Secondly the government intervened by providing tax relief on mortgage interest payments in 1923. Finally the building societies themselves eager to lend funds reduced the size of deposits borrowers had to save thereby accelerating the expansion in owner-occupier households.

In addition to encouraging the construction of new homes, the government passed the Housing (Additional Powers) Act of 1919. Builders were granted subsidies for houses they constructed regardless of whether the house was for purchase or rent. These subsidies were to continue until 1934 helping to fuel the suburban expansion.

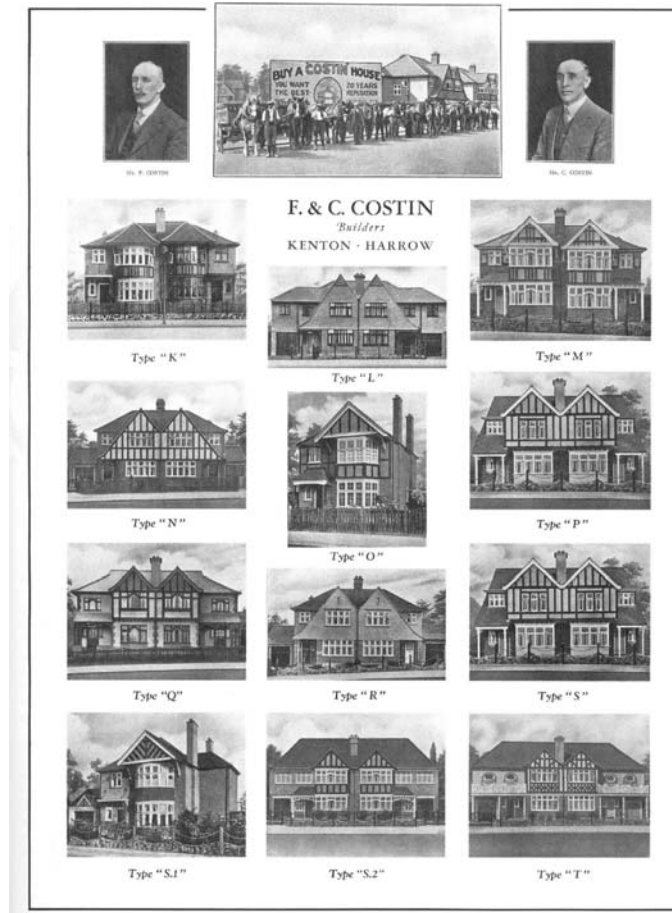
### 3.7 The Role of the Speculative Builder

In 1919 the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates Ltd was formed with £150,000 starting capital and the full resources of the Met's publicity department. Land was bought in Wembley, Kingsbury and Rickmansworth and construction of "superior houses" was begun to attract a new army of

commuters. To help matters, the symbolic map of the Metropolitan network was designed in such a way as to give the impression that the new suburban centres were closer to the centre of London than the reality. As Edwards and Pigram (1983 p.12) comment; 'Selbie felt his mission was to provide houses fit for heroes to live in – provided they could put down the deposit with their demobilization gratuity and keep up the monthly payments.' However, despite the persuasive advertising illustrating attractive Tudorbethan homes and their "relative affordability", the majority of the houses on the new Met estates such as 'Chalk Hill' in Wembley and 'The Cedars' at Rickmansworth, were beyond the financial reach of the average City clerk. Furthermore with family sizes decreasing there was less need for large houses.

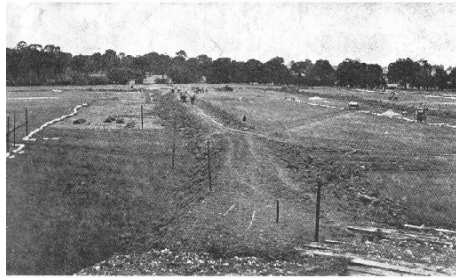
It was the actions of speculative builders that were to fundamentally shape the suburbs of NWL for the masses. The Tudor Walters Report and 'Manual' showed developers how to build on cheap undeveloped land on the outskirts of cities along new routes of communication at a density of no more than 12 single family houses to the acre. By the 1920s Comben and Wakeling and Costins (Figure 3.4) were already building in Wembley, Kenton and Harrow small modern 'homes for the mortgaged' (Jackson, 1991 p.99). As a result in 1926, private developers completed 25,200 new homes in Greater London. This rose to 44,800 in 1931 and 72,700 in 1934. What is even more surprising about these later figures was that the world was undergoing the Great Depression following the 1929 Wall Street Crash. Moreover the vast majority of the new dwellings were semi-detached owner-occupier houses. For cost reasons the semi became the preferred form of housing by builders though a surprisingly bewildering array of the basic three-bedroom form was offered to prospective buyers (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Costin Advertising, 1923 (Source Jackson, 1991 p.109).



Although the Metropolitan Railway continued to control large amounts of land adjacent to the railway, it preferred to develop estates with large prestigious homes. However, the success small developers were having with their estates of semi-detached houses throughout Wembley, Harrow and Kenton near the Euston Mainline and Bakerloo services finally prompted the MRCE in 1929 to arrange with ES Reid (A former Director of Highways for Harrow Council) to construct Harrow Garden Suburb near Rayners Lane Station. For the first time the Met was developing affordable housing with prices from £790 freehold (Figure 3.5). At the same time fares became cheaper and the services more frequent as a result of the prudent electrification of the line to Rickmansworth, Uxbridge and Watford

Figure 3.5 Rural Middlesex, 1929



Harrow Garden Village, 1931



Source Jackson, 1991 p.179

The floodgates were opened. Within five years large estates of semis were being developed. From 1931 T.F. Nash started to develop an estate of 4,000 houses to the south of Rayners Lane extending to Eastcote. Manor Homes were spreading around Ruislip Manor and Jennings and Laings Properties were building at Kingsbury and Queensbury, respectively, along the new Metropolitan Stanmore Branch (Renamed the Jubilee Line in 1977), which opened in 1933. To the west the Piccadilly Line reached Rayners Lane in 1934. Interestingly development north of Ealing, along the Rayners Lane Service provided more affordable housing than that along the Metropolitan Line. In part this was probably due to monopolistic influence of the MRCE and its own highly successful publicity campaign, a sort of Marks and Spencer's of its day. On the other hand the intense competition among the speculative builders and their extensive use of standardised components, cheap labour and an industrial approach to construction with significant benefits being gained through scale economies resulted in less sought after areas having lower house prices. For example a Cutler-built 3-bedroom semi in North Harrow in 1925 would have cost £920 whereas six years later a Nash House in South Harrow would cost £790 (Jackson, 1991 p.70 and 99). Moreover by the mid 1930s many small builders, unable to compete with the larger firms using the industrial approach to building, were being absorbed or forced out of business. Indeed a number of the successful house builders were to become major players in the global construction market during the rest of the century.



Not all builders were solely constructing three and four bedroom semi-detached houses. With the emergence of a new young, professional class, the interwar period saw the emergence of a new housing market. Unlike the families who sought space for their children in the semis of NWL, the new affluent professionals had different needs. They mainly wanted a modern pied à terre with good access to the city and to the arterial road network. As a result apartment blocks began to be built along the main routes such as the Tudorbethan Vernon Court in Cricklewood, close to the Finchley Road extension, the Modernist Nevilles Court in Dollis Hill, close to the North Circular and the Oriental Elm Park Court in Pinner, near the A404. Generally these buildings were seen as modern and dynamic. However they were expensive with leases costing £120p.a. Indeed as Bowdler (In Saint, 1999 p.125) comments 'Less than a decade in renting would buy one a house outright in Wembley.'

Although there had been considerable advances in the level of new build housing during the 1920s, the continued presence of overcrowded slums and need to provide healthier accommodation led to the passing of the Housing Act in 1930. Much of the Act was concerned with slum clearance however, inspired by the success of European housing schemes, the architects of the Modern Movement persuaded the Housing Minister, Arthur Greenwood, to include a special subsidy for flat construction, (Cherry, 1996 pp78-9). Although MARS successfully developed Kensal Rise House and the London County Council developed a number of Neo-Georgian blocks of flats, overall apartment accommodation was relatively rare in the suburbs of NWL during the interwar period. It was not until the fifties and sixties that large municipal schemes were developed across the boroughs.

Even before the onset of the Second World War, developers were finding it increasingly difficult to sell the houses they had built, indeed from 1935 sales began to fall. In part this can be explained by the growing commuting

distance from the city and secondly by the higher living costs incurred by living in the suburbs. By 1938 the average London family was spending £15 a year on commuting or 8% of the working-class family income (Barlow Commission, 1940). Compared with Inner London and its cheap street markets, the chrome plated shop fronts of the smart suburban parades were expensive places to shop. Moreover with so much new housing built with the nuclear family in mind, with just one male bread earner, it was inevitable that demand for semi-detached housing would cease to grow.

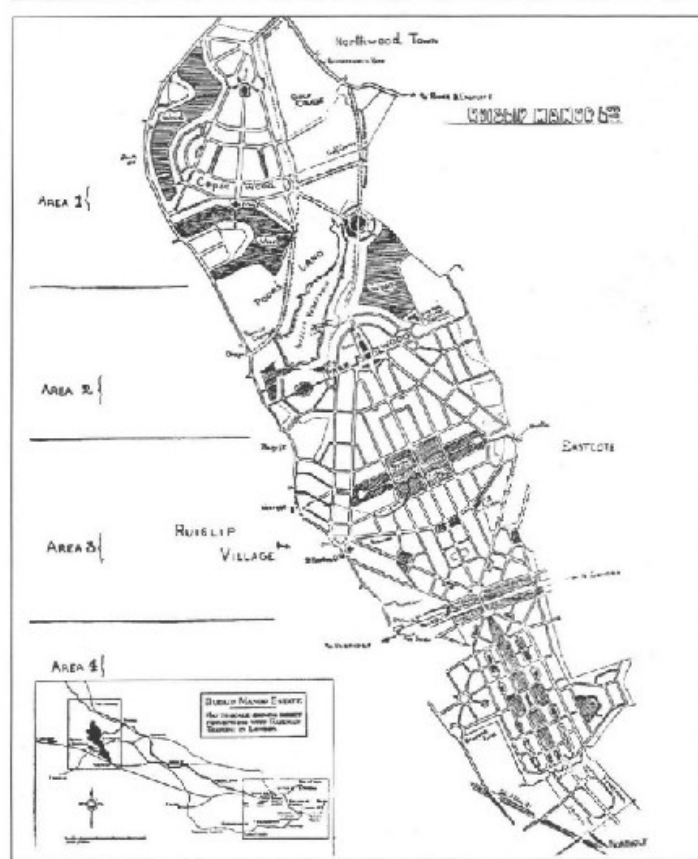
### 3.8 The Role of Planning

One of reasons why the interwar suburbs developed as they did was as a direct result of the emerging British Planning System and its inherent weaknesses. Following the successes of the Garden City movement in the building of Letchworth, Ealing and Hampstead, the Liberal government introduced the Town and Country Planning Act (1909). The object according to John Burns (1908), the President of the Local Government Board was to: "Seek to diminish what have been called bye-law streets, with little law and much monotony." The Act allowed local authorities for the first time to formulate plans for the development of land. Planning authorities could establish densities, land use zones and road widths. Detailed plans then had to be submitted to the Local Government Board.

One of the first places in the country to adopt a plan was the Ruislip-Northwood Urban District Council. In 1887, a local developer, Frank Murray Maxwell Hallowell Carew, had purchased 767 acres of the Eastbury Estate near the newly opened Metropolitan Railway's Northwood Station. He had divided the land into building plots which he subsequently sold off. One of the purchasers was the British Freeholds Investment Syndicate whose main aim was to "Buy land wholesale at the very lowest prices, cut it up into plots and retail it at a reasonable profit." This had sent shock waves through the local community.

One of the major local landowners, Kings College, Cambridge in association with Ruislip Manor Limited (Formerly connected with Garden Estates Limited of Hampstead Garden Suburb fame) had organised a competition in 1909 to develop a garden suburb. This was won by the Soutar Brothers (Figure 3.6). Following the new act, Kings College worked closely with the local council to develop the Joint Ruislip-Northwood and Ruislip Manor Town Planning Scheme (1914).

Figure 3.6 Soutar Scheme for Ruislip Manor (Tottman, 1982).



The principal aspects of the scheme included the layout and width of roads, the location of shopping centres, factory areas and open spaces and the grading of housing density. To prevent any large landowner jeopardizing the spirit of the plan, on no single acre was the number of buildings to exceed twenty. In small houses, the area and cubic capacity of bedrooms was controlled. As a final protection the Council proposed to refer any

design deemed unsatisfactory to a consulting architect. The scheme eventually envisaged a population of 70,000 people, a number that was eventually reached in the sixties despite the development and political pressure of speculative builders in the thirties (Boulton, 1994).

Despite this and other successes, the 1909 Act was amended in 1919 to prevent delays in the provision of houses, in line with 'the homes for heroes' government policy. As a result developers were allowed to proceed without waiting for the final approval of local plans. Local planning authorities had until 1923 to submit their plans. Few achieved this, so in 1925 the time was extended to 1929. Unfortunately this only added to the confusion and with the lack of trained planners, the likelihood of plans being lodged in time was doomed to fail. Consequently developers were able to build relatively unchecked during this period. In 1932 the Town and Country Planning Act dropped the compulsion to prepare schemes and extended the planning provision to all types of land.

The rapid absorption of rural Middlesex and the joining up of the old villages into the Greater London built environment sent shockwaves through some sections of the community. One of the worst excesses was ribbon development. With the desire of speculators to reduce construction costs by not having to build local roads, they had taken to building indiscriminately along the new arterial routes. These new roads had been built to reduce congestion not to create more. The passing of the Ribbon Development Act 1935 finally restricted this type of development. However more far reaching controls were sought. By the thirties Raymond Unwin was advocating a 'Green Girdle' for London to stop unrestricted suburban spread. Even Frank Pick was seeing a limit to the development of commuter networks and the stresses suburban expansion was putting on the transport routes. The joint efforts of local authorities and the London County Council to purchase green sites for preservation culminated in the Green Belt (London and Home

Counties) Act 1938, (See Thomas, 1964). This and the Second World War was to bring an end to the growth of Metro-land.

### 3.9 The Consumer Society

The fifth major theme, which helps to explain the growth of the interwar suburbs of NWL, is the emergence of the consumer society. As Newby and Turner (2001 p.32) comment; 'The growth of the suburbs is intimately connected with the growth in consumption and mass consumerism.' For the first time large numbers of working people had disposable income. The developments that had helped to create the transport systems and new white-collar jobs were producing a new range of mass consumer products. Motorcars, electrical goods and products for the home became available for the new suburbanite. Many of the new products were made in the new industrial estates of London, the majority of which were located in the thriving suburbs.

Consequently the image of interwar suburbia simply being a dormitory for The City and West End of London ignores a key aspect of the suburbs. Many new industries took advantage of the excellent communication links and the proximity to the expanding London market by locating in NWL. Key areas included area Wembley, Greenford and Harrow. Many of these businesses developed from earlier First World War munitions factories such as the British Thomson-Houston works at Park Royal and the de Havilland aircraft factory at Kingsbury. Emerging new technologies in electrical goods, automotive components, food processing and medical research linked with the emergence of a consumer society was to see many new firms grow in the interwar suburbs of NWL.

Some of these estates were well served by public transport, though in Wembley for example, large numbers of factory workers lived close enough to their work to be able to walk or cycle. Similarly, the Laing-built industrial estate in Kingsbury was adjacent to employees homes. However other

estates were less well connected. In the case of Park Royal, although the railway lines and new roads were a major reason for locating in the area, the communication links acted as a barrier for local people trying to gain access to the area. Indeed workers commuting from further away found it quicker and easier to travel to Park Royal than residents in neighbouring Willesden. In the Willesden Survey of 1949 (Morris, 1950 pp. 38-48) it was found that only 32% of local people worked in the neighbouring industrial estates and that for many this was due to the poor east-west transport connections.

The predominantly radial nature of the suburban railway services with their strong links to the City and West End had two effects. First most factory workers walked, cycled or took the bus to work during the interwar years whereas most office workers took the train. Secondly, as a result one of the most damaging effects of the transport system was the emergence of a white-collar blue-collar divide regarding the use of buses in the suburbs. The stigma attached to using buses has continued today.

The early desire of the train companies to attract city commuters from the new suburbs to boost their profits was in the long-term going to create a dependency on the service (See Westgaard, 1957). By the 1930s Frank Pick had realised that the increased commuter market was putting unnecessary stresses on the network twice a day and adding to the congestion in Inner London, (Jackson, 1991 p.73). Moreover while efforts were focused on building new longer routes into the centre, very few cross routes were built linking the growing suburban centres. The few link services, such as the suggested Stanmore-Watford connection, were abandoned after the Second World War and others such as the Harrow Wealdstone and Stanmore services were victim to the Beeching Axe in the sixties. A similar fate doomed the proposed Cricklewood-Willesden-Acton service.

As the estates were built, many of the speculative builders realised the need to supply local shops and services. Smart parades of shops sprung up close to the railway and bus stations. Schools, places of worship and cinemas opened their doors. The growing significance of the suburbs was often reflected in the new civic centres such as the Clifford Strange's Wembley Town Hall (1935-40). However as Jackson, 1991 p.73 comments: 'Almost without exception, the low-density housing estates provided by the building firms between 1923 and 1939 coalesced uncomfortably into new communities which were little more than haphazard accretions of residential roads around a railway station or main thoroughfare.' Although this was true, these arrangements were to become one of the key sustainable features of the suburbs. With local shops and services, the dependence of suburbanites on Inner London would diminish. Some of the centres would grow into major centres. Unfortunately in NWL, although there would be improvements to the road system, the railways would not be developed beyond their pre-war levels.

#### 4. Post War Metro-land

The outbreak of the Second World War in the autumn of 1939 effectively stopped the speculative builders in their tracks as manpower and resources were redirected to the war effort. Up to this point, the Government had been supportive of the growth of home ownership and the degree of stability it had offered the economy through a steady stream of saving and investment (Ambrose, 1986 pp. 20-22). However, Hall et al (1973 p.457) suggest that by the thirties the governing classes were becoming increasingly concerned, 'by the evidence of the mass democracy of the market place in action. An important minority of them resolved to take positive action by the state to stop it...after the publication of the Barlow Report, the minority view became the received view of the majority.' O'Connor (1973 p.6) sees the issue in terms of a class struggle arguing 'A capitalist state that openly uses its coercive forces to help one class to accumulate capital at the expense of other classes loses its legitimacy and hence undermines the basis of its loyalty and support.'

Consequently, partly as a result of the war and partly due to changing attitudes both within government and public opinion, the government reassessed the balance between its accumulation and legitimisation functions. To put it simply the Government was faced with striking a new balance between on the one hand the stability a growing laissez-faire middle class suburbia had to offer compared with the continuing drift of jobs and population to the south and on the other the need to rebuild the bomb damaged aging and overcrowded cities. As a result, by the time the developers were in a position to resume house building in NWL, Parliament had passed the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and London was being ringed by the Green Belt, (Whitehand and Carr, 2001 pp. 37-38). The 1947 Act was to shape the pattern of land-use and the institutions behind it for the next twenty-five years.



During the war, the speculative residential suburbs of NWL with their low-density housing fared relatively well in terms of casualties and physical damage. Most of the attacks in the area were aimed at the new industrial estates such as Park Royal, Wembley and Colindale which had switched production to support the war effort, as well as many of the rail and communication links. However by the end of the war, nine out of ten buildings in Inner London had been damaged by bomb and rocket attacks (Humphries and Taylor, 1986). The scale of the war damage in the cities was to act as a catalyst for change in land-use policy.

#### 4.1 The Path to Reform

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was the result of a long-term path to reform. Since the economic depression of the thirties, governments had been aware of the extreme social problems that were present throughout the country. The depression had seen the demise of many of the old heavy industries of the North and the loss of much rural employment, however the new light manufacturing and related businesses were booming in the south and Midlands (See Hall, 1962). Large numbers of people moved to the growth areas in search of work. As a result the combined population of Middlesex and London increased by 18% during the twenties and thirties (Whitehand and Carr, 2001 p.37). One of the main areas to benefit was NWL both in terms of homes and jobs, with many of the new businesses locating along the newly built arterial routes such as the Western Avenue and the North Circular.

However, in pre-war London there remained many cases of extreme overcrowding and poverty especially in the East End and areas on the margins of the central core. In Tower Hamlets alone there were over 500,000 people living in the borough (Today there are half that number). In many respects the availability of cheap greenfield sites on the then outskirts of London, the development of new communications and lack of effective land planning policies had helped developers to leap frog the older,

overcrowded and declining areas. Problematic districts were simply left to further stagnate by the private developer. Moreover, unlike earlier times in London's development, there was a significant migration of the expanding middle class out of the city centre in search of home ownership. This was not only to having a detrimental impact on the economic diversity on the Inner London local neighbourhood economies but was to fundamentally upset the social diversity in the Capital. This was to mark the beginning of an increasingly polarised structure of extreme poverty and wealth in Central London and an increasingly affluent middle class in the suburbs (See Short, 1996 pp.152-168).

Even before the war, the drift of employment and people to the South, suburbanization of the countryside and decline of the cities were major public concerns. Consequently, on becoming Prime Minister in 1937, Neville Chamberlain (the former leader of the innovative Birmingham City Council), established the Royal Commission on the Industrial Population chaired by Sir Anderson Montague-Barlow. With the onset of war further commissions were established including the Uthwatt Committee on Compensation and Betterment and the Scott Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas in 1941 and the Beveridge Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services in 1942. As Cherry (1996 p.87) comments; ' Extensive state intervention seemed justified as national organisation and centralized control proved more effective than either high prices or laissez-faire in stimulating supply for the war effort.'

A second reason why there was such interest in extending state involvement during the war was the desire to build a new and better Britain. 'Not only would the war be won: it would be followed by a similar campaign against the forces of want.' Cullingworth and Nadin (1997 pp. 19-20). In the 1945 election, Clement Attlee's Labour Party won with a majority of 394 seats against the Conservatives 210. 'These included large numbers of suburban and commuter constituencies, cathedral cities and other unlikely

strongholds of Socialism,' comments Morgan (1992 p.27). The new Labour administration saw its role, as the bringer of the Welfare State with Bevin's 'from the cradle to the grave' philosophy.

#### 4.2 Post War Policy Change

One aspect of this emerging culture was to develop a more effective land use planning system. The Barlow Committee (1940 p.10 para.24) had found that; 'There is no duty imposed on any authority or government department to view the country as a whole and to consider the problems of industrial, commercial and urban growth in the light of the needs of the entire population.' As a result following the war, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act made it compulsory for all planning authorities to produce local plans. Moreover land-use was effectively nationalised with most development subject to planning permission.

The second major aspect of the new legislation was to end urban sprawl and to introduce mechanisms for urban containment (See Hall et al, 1973 and Hall, 1996 for definitive history and discussion). During the war years, Patrick Abercrombie and J Forshaw had produced the County of London Plan in 1943 and Abercrombie, the Greater London Plan in 1944. Apart from serving on the Barlow Committee, Abercrombie was President of The Council for the Preservation of Rural England. Like many he was concerned by the threat posed by urban expansion into the countryside both in terms of the loss of agricultural land and the impact on the landscape amenities. Back in 1901, William Bull and Lord Meath, following a trip to the United States, advanced the idea of a green girdle for London (See Thomas, 1964). The concept was further developed by Raymond Unwin in 1933 and adopted by the new majority Labour Party in London County Council in 1935. The Scott Committee in 1944 strongly supported the idea of Green Belts. However it was Dudley Stamp's Land Survey of 1944 which demonstrated the loss of large tracts of irreplaceable Grade 1 agricultural land to the expansion of suburban London. Using this information,

Abercrombie, 1944 devised a Green Belt of between 16kms and 30kms deep for London. Over the next twenty years green belts became the principal tool of urban containment in England. As far as NWL was concerned, the era of the speculative builder transforming large swathes of countryside at an ever-increasing distance from the centre into suburbia was over.

#### 4.3 New Towns Policy

The third dimension of post war land-use policy followed on from the Barlow Committee recommendation (1940 p.86 s.175) that industry and jobs needed to be redistributed. In the 1944 Greater London Plan, Abercrombie had forwarded the idea of building eight to ten new towns or expanded towns around London about fifty miles from the centre. By moving people out from the overcrowded central areas and redistributing jobs in a planned way, some of the worst problems of London would be reduced. This concept was strongly supported by the first minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin (See Cherry, 1996 pp. 120-6).

Ironically despite the growth of suburbia, one of London's most overcrowded districts in the post war period was Kilburn and Willesden in NWL. Here there was one of the highest incidences of multiple family occupancy of the same dwelling house in the UK (Leff and Blunden, 1966 pp. 49-50). Following the New Towns Act, 1946 and the subsequent designation and construction of the new towns, Willesden's District Council became a strong promoter of the new towns actively encouraging local people to move away to them in order to help relieve the desperate overcrowding situation. As a result many of the new residents of Hemel Hempstead and Harlow originated from NWL.

#### 4.4 The Fifties Boom

By the early fifties, with a lack of European competition and pick up in world trade the economy was booming. Rationing ended in 1952 and wages were

increasing, as was, contrary to earlier predictions, the population. Despite such a high degree of state involvement in land-use and development there was a boom in private house building. The incoming 1951 Conservative Government set a target of building 300,000 new homes a year. To meet the demand for new housing the final controls on the construction industry were lifted in 1954 with a repeal of the licensing system encompassed in Defence Regulation 56A (See Merrett, 1982). Hence the new Elizabethan Era began on a wave of optimism.

Although the greenbelt legislation prevented the suburbs of NWL from spreading out further, there were still a number of development opportunities. First there were still a number of estates awaiting completion, secondly there were opportunities to infill on open spaces and allotments and thirdly there was the issue of redevelopment.

#### 4.5 Estate Completion

A number of speculative builders attempted to continue where they had left off in 1939 by finishing off estates. Often the road systems and services had been laid out and a few houses completed but many would be part built or not even started. Consequently there was a determination to finish off these estates such as the Costin Estate in Woodcock Hill.

#### 4.6 Infill Housing

There remained large amounts of land suitable for development in NWL. According to the Middlesex Development Plan (1951 p. 225) there were still 1,250 vacant residential plots in Ealing, 1,500 in Harrow and 975 in Wembley. These sites would frequently include allotments, British Railway land and back lands (Figure 4.1).

#### 4.7 Redevelopment of larger sites

The greenbelt effectively increased the value of land in Greater London. With the increase in land values developers could begin to look at

redeveloping the older larger sites. These were frequently occupied by Victorian and Edwardian properties. Redevelopment took generally one of three forms. First building small houses over large gardens, second dividing large houses into flats with possible extensions and thirdly demolition and full redevelopment of the site.

Hence by 1961 the Middlesex Survey revealed that the residential area of the County actually increased by 5.7% between 1951-61. However a more profound effect was starting to emerge. The Survey had revealed that in the inner urban areas, which had the highest population densities, local authorities carried out 80% of residential building work whereas in the suburbs the majority of new house building was carried out by the private sector (53%). This would suggest that the post-war property developers were no different to the pre-war speculators in terms of seeking out the easiest business opportunities.

#### 4.8 The Growing Role of the Public Sector

However the figure is more revealing in terms of the increased role of the public sector as a house builder in the suburbs and diminishing role of the speculative builder. Throughout the interwar period the majority of house building in Metro-land was aimed at the private buyer. With the exception of the Watling Street Estate and a handful of projects, public housing was minimal in the suburbs of NWL. By the mid fifties with the emergence of the inner city slum clearance programmes central government was beginning to put increased pressure on suburban areas to accept more public housing to relieve the desperate overcrowding. At Headstone Lane in Harrow an estate of 1100 homes was grafted on to a middle class interwar estate (Johnson, 1964 p. 162) (Figure 4.2). Many of the designs of these post war municipal estates were a product of the 1949 Housing Manual which provided greater internal space than the earlier Tudor Walters public housing standards.

Fig 4.1 1960s Infill Housing, Pinner



Fig 4.2 1950s Headstone Lane



The expansion of public housing into middle class suburbia was strongly resisted both by local residents and local councils. Since the late thirties London County Council had found it increasingly difficult to acquire land in the suburbs to help relieve the overcrowding in the inner city. In the post war years the situation was made even more crucial as the role of the local authority as a housing provider was made even more essential due to the almost complete lack of construction of private housing for rent between the end of the Second World War and the sixties (Merrett, 1982 p.33). Even during the interwar housing boom, some properties were built for rent in Metro-land. On the one hand this can be seen as a reaction by the builders to an almost complete lack of demand for such property but that may have been due to the large-scale public sector house building schemes under way. Alternatively with a strong economy, low mortgage rates and growing disposable incomes, the appeal of home ownership was continuing to grow. Between 1938 and 1960 the percentage of the population who were living in owner-occupied homes rose from 32% to 44%.

#### 4.9 Chalk Hill Estate, Wembley

By the mid fifties as development sites in suburban London were beginning to dry up, coupled with a growing pressure to re-house population from inner London's most deprived areas, a number of authorities became increasingly aware of the piecemeal way some developers were seeking out some of the older larger sites for redevelopment. One particularly notorious case of the late fifties and early sixties occurred in Wembley on the original

Metropolitan Railway Chalk Hill Estate. During the fifties private developers had started to move in with the idea of constructing more dwellings on the large gardens of the properties. In 1960 the Minister of Housing and Local Governments issued a circular which urged more intensive use of land in built up areas. Consequently in 1962 Wembley District Council devised a scheme for the Chalkhill/Barnhill Roads Redevelopment Area. The object was to let the private sector redevelop the area in a planned way.

However the neighbouring Borough of Willesden began to buy up as much of the property as possible (Willesden Mercury, 1964). As far as Willesden Council was concerned, it was a chance to ease their overcrowded housing crisis. To the owner-occupiers of Wembley, Willesden's action was seen as a threat to their surroundings and property values. The redevelopment of Chalk Hill was to become one of the fiercest political battles in NWL made only worse in 1965 when the two district councils were merged into the London Borough of Brent. The public housing apartment complex that was eventually built on the site with its sky walkways, health centre and elementary school became so problematic that in 1998, redevelopment of the twenty acre housing site began again (See Figures 4.3 and 4.4).

Fig 4.3 1960s Chalkhill



Fig 4.4 2002 Chalkhill





#### 4.10 From the Sixties to the Nineties

From the mid 1960s NWL began to undergo a number of fundamental changes. This can be divided into three main areas. The first relates to changes in local employment, the second relates to changes in government policy towards housing and the third relates to greater car dependency.

#### 4.11 Changes in Employment

During the interwar period trading estates had grown up at Park Royal, Honeypot Lane, Wembley Stadium and along the major arterial routes of the North Circular (A406) and the A40. These sites became centres for the then new industries of electrical, light and automotive engineering and food processing. During the 1950s the size and number of firms grew spurred on by the growing export markets employing large numbers of professional and skilled workers, many of who lived locally.

By the 1980s, increased competition from overseas, the aging infrastructure and confines of these older estates, coupled with improvements in communications, especially road and telecommunications, resulted in a growing number of major employers leaving their NWL sites, such as GEC in Wembley and Leyland Trucks and Heinz foods in Park Royal. Many of these firms relocated production to greenfield sites in areas with lower costs, whilst others moved to existing cheaper sites elsewhere in the country or overseas. With the relocation of the larger businesses, growing numbers of the smaller supply firms who were dependent on these larger firms or each other, either moved out of London too, or as the local cycle of decline worsened and the structural economic changes of the 1980s took hold, out of business.

Many of the skilled employees relocated with the businesses or where the new jobs were being created (e.g. Breheny, 1999a) leaving a growing population of unemployed unskilled workers in the area. Lack of investment in the infrastructure precipitated the overall decline of a number of

neighbourhoods, further putting off new investment. At the same time in East London the formation of the London Docklands Development Corporation shifted attention away from the growing problems of NWL.

Growing unemployment, crime and the riots of the 1980s brought home the need to regenerate cities. The Harlesden City Challenge was one attempt to reverse the decline in part of NWL with significant levels of funding from the scheme being used to regenerate the Park Royal Industrial Estate through the Park Royal Partnership. Partly as a result of these regeneration efforts, there are now currently 40,000 people employed on the estate, nearly twice the number from the low of the 1980s but below the 45,430 peak of 1966 (Llewelyn Davies, 2001, IEFER (1981), and London Borough of Brent, 1981).

Interestingly there have been three fundamental changes to the structure of the estate which could be related to the other trading estates of NWL. First the number of companies in Park Royal increased from 302 companies in 1966 to 1,980 firms today. As a result the area is now less dependent on major firms and benefits from a more diverse range of economic activities. Unfortunately many of these firms are very small, employ very few people and are themselves very vulnerable to failure.

The second major effect has been the change in use of business units from factories to warehouses. Not only are fewer people employed on the sites but more critically the skills requirement is low, generating low wages for the employees. As a result, the prosperity of the surrounding neighbourhoods is reduced. The conversion of factory sites into warehouse sites has been occurring throughout NWL but most notably in the Wembley Stadium and East Lane estates. Moreover a growing number of employment sites including former hospital sites have been absorbed into housing or retail schemes such as the former Kingsbury Hospital site on Honeypot Lane.

The third effect of the changes on the Park Royal Estate has been the reduction in the number of local people working on the estate with only 40% of employees coming from the adjoining boroughs. The problem is further aggravated when it is appreciated that the more highly paid workers generally live outside the area (Llewelyn Davies, 2001).

Such an analysis begins to show that employment changes during the past twenty years in NWL has had a profound effect, with older industries moving out and less skilled jobs replacing the lost jobs thereby undermining the prosperity of the area. Moreover it also reveals the way growing numbers of employment sites are under threat from housing, retail and leisure redevelopment.

#### 4.12 Government Housing Policy

The expansion of the 'Right to Buy' scheme, reduction in public sector housing provision and the switching of council housing stocks to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) during the 1980s and 1990s has not only resulted in a higher number of people buying their own homes (80%) but has made social housing, the housing of last resort. This has resulted in the concentration of poverty in some estates. More recently the growth of the private rental sector has created a new set of issues with some areas showing increasing signs of overcrowding, deteriorating environmental conditions and rising levels of deprivation. Both these themes will be returned to in chapters six and seven.

#### 4.13 Car Dependency

The third major issue for the suburbs of NWL over the past thirty years has been the expansion of car ownership. Although the increased number of vehicles and trip generation are very important, after taking advice, it was considered that tackling the dynamics of this specific subject would in itself be an extensive piece of work beyond the scope of this thesis. However among the many issues which increased car ownership has created is the

way distance is perceived with the development of new retail and leisure centres, its impact on traditional centres, the quality of the environment in terms of pollution, congestion and the need for more space for parking, and the growing distances between work, schools and home. Car ownership has opened up a far more complex approach to journeys highlighting among other issues the weaknesses with the public transport network with the railway services geared essentially with servicing the city centre rather than around the edges and the bus services using the same traffic congested roads.

#### 4.14 Conclusion

In conclusion the suburbs of NWL have continued to change since the end of World War Two. Much of the aging infrastructure has remained unaltered, demonstrating the relatively successful form of suburbia. However changes in lifestyles, employment, greater car dependency, and government policy has resulted in parts of NWL being left behind in the urban renaissance. However the growing population and the pursuance of compact city policies by Government has increased the need for more development in the suburbs. This thesis will now continue by investigating the changing population and how this is acting as a catalyst for adopting a new approach in planning for treating the suburbs.

## 5. Population

### 5.1 Introduction and Data Sources

This chapter explores the changing demographics of the suburbs of NWL. It first describes the historical and recent trends in the natural increase rates and migration profiles of the area. It then analyses the patterns that have emerged and come to some suggestions as to why these may have occurred. The third section will make some comments as to the effect these changes will have on planning in NWL, on the neighbouring regions and planning for regeneration in general.

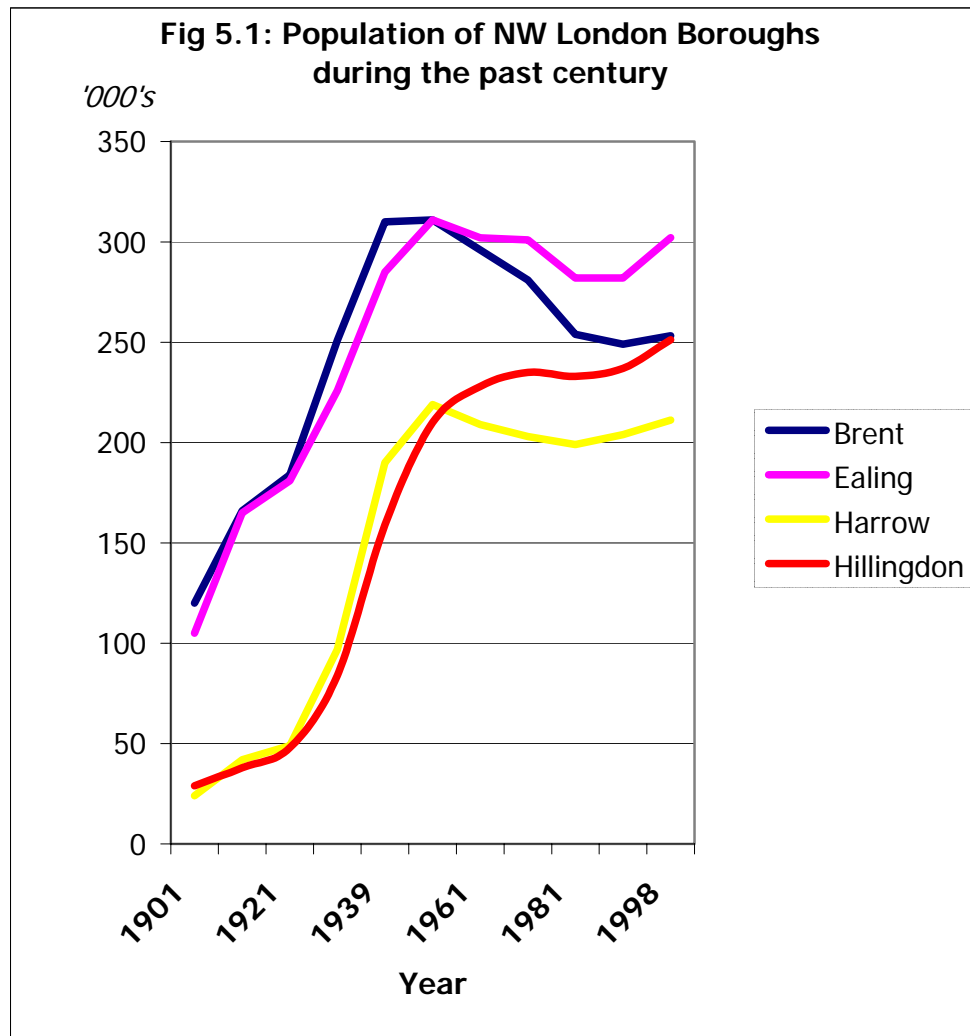
Data for this analysis has been drawn from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the National Health Register, the International Passenger Survey, education reports from Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon and evidence collected by the LRC and GLA.

### 5.2 Population Change

As in the rest of London, the population of NWL has undergone a radical change over the past 100 years. Figure 5.1 illustrates how the population of the first half of the twentieth century mushroomed with the growth of suburbia and peaked for the innermost boroughs in 1951. Between the mid fifties and the early eighties all three of the inner boroughs of Brent, Harrow and Ealing had falling populations. Only Hillingdon, the outer borough, has continued to grow throughout. This population growth can in part be attributed to the development of Heathrow airport, new commercial enterprises adjacent to the emerging motorway network and the availability of both brownfield and greenfield sites for development including housing.

Since the mid eighties all the study boroughs have seen a steady increase in their populations. In percentage terms this is broadly in line with the general increase in the overall size of London's population. Indeed in numerical terms, Ealing and Harrow both appear to be returning to their

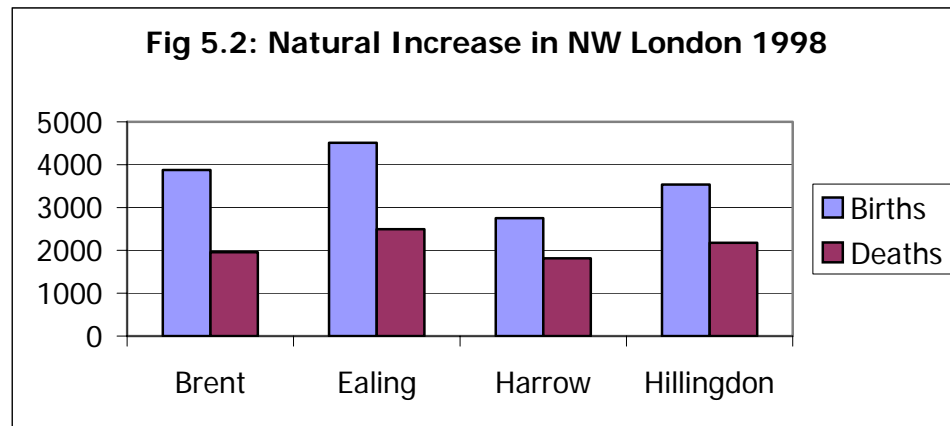
1951 population peaks. Only Brent appears to be lagging behind but even here the decline has been halted and a gradual growth has recently begun to occur.



Source: LRC London 95 and ONS, Focus on London 2000

Much of the recent population growth in NWL appears to be through natural increase with a surplus of live births over deaths. This difference is demonstrated in Figure 5.2 using the most recent 1998 figures.

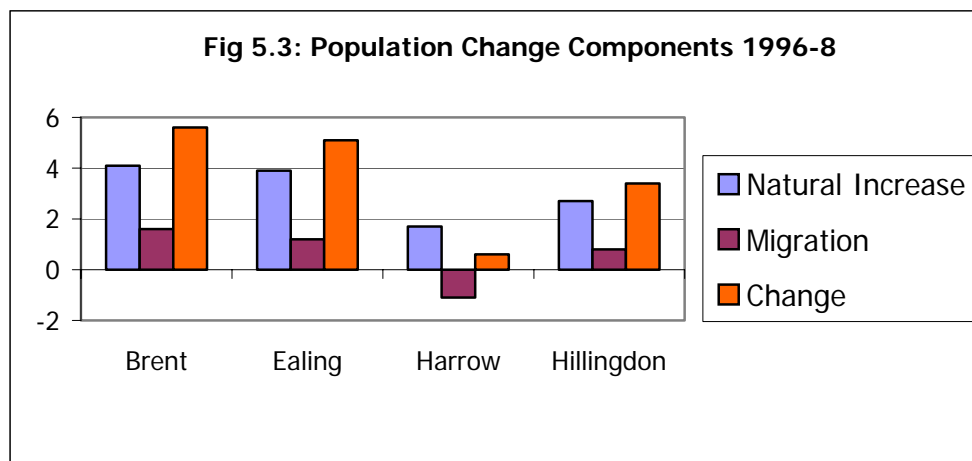
Throughout the nineties, according to ONS figures, the numbers of both births and deaths has remained relatively static except for the number of live births in Brent which has fallen by 5% during the same period.



Source: ONS, Focus on London 2000

### 5.3 Migration

In many respects migration is having a more significant effect upon the demographic profile of the area than natural increase. Overall migration into the area has been augmenting the natural increase. Between 1996-98 Brent experienced a 4.1% growth due to natural increase with migration and other changes contributing an additional 1.6% increase in the overall population. Ealing and Hillingdon experienced similar changes. Only Harrow experienced a net decline of 1.15% through migration (Figure 5.3).



Source: ONS, Focus on London 2000

Champion's (1998 and 2002) work demonstrated that in 1991 most British cities were experiencing falling populations. Between 1990 and 1991 Inner London lost 31,009 and Outer London 21,159. However it was the way people were migrating that most interested the Newcastle team. Referring to the phenomenon as a 'counter-urbanisation cascade', people were moving out from the city centres to the suburbs, from the suburbs to the fringe and from the fringe to the small towns and rural areas. Often migrants would leap frog one or two of the stages.

In the case of NWL this pattern of migration has been long established. Residents of Wembley in search of that semi-rural arcadia promoted in Metro-land have traditionally moved out to Harrow and Pinner and similarly Harrow and Pinner residents have moved into or beyond the Green Belt to the market towns of Amersham, High Wycombe and Beaconsfield. Originally this outward migration would have moved along the Metropolitan Railway route but from the late sixties onwards, with the gradual completion of the M4, M40 and M25 links around London, the car has freed migrants from the public transport constraint. However, as will be demonstrated, there has also been a significant level of migration between adjoining boroughs.

In attempting to gain some understanding of the most recent trends of migration in NWL there is one fundamental problem; the last complete set of available migration data was the 1991 census. Unfortunately eleven years later there have been radical changes to the social, economic and political life of Londoners. One innovative solution is to use the annually updated National Health Register. Although not complete, many people when they move, will soon register with a local GP. Hence the GLA for example have adopted this register as a useful tool to demonstrate migration patterns. Unfortunately there are two drawbacks with this data as pointed out to the author by Janet Dobson of UCL and John Hollis of the GLA. First these data sets are far from complete due to many people not bothering to register with their local doctors and secondly the areas relate to NHS regions and



not local authorities. However for the purpose of this analysis and in view of the shortage of more comprehensive recent census data, the figures for the Brent and Harrow Health Authority and the Hillingdon Health Authority provide a useful insight into the recent migration patterns in and around NWL.

The first issue that stands out is the significant numbers of people who are on the move. In 1998, 30,355 people moved to a new doctor outside the Brent and Harrow Health Authority. 15,500 (51% of these moves) remained in the London Area with 6,903 (23% of moves) moving to adjoining London health authorities. 14,855 (49% of moves) moved out of London of which 7,261 (24% of moves) moved to neighbouring regions in the south and east with the remainder migrating to other parts of the UK. During the same period, Brent and Harrow Health authority gained 24,400 patients of which 15,768 (65%) came from other parts of London and 35% from the rest of the UK. Data for the Hillingdon Health Authority showed that 14,031 moved from the area's doctors of whom only 4,470 (32%) remained within the London area. However at the same time Hillingdon gained 13,835 patients of which 7,864 (56%) were from London. Unfortunately the figures for Ealing, due to the inclusion of the Boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow, was considered to be outside the study area, though the trends were similar to Brent and Harrow.

The second issue is the significance of life cycles and migration patterns. Analysis of the age structure shows that the largest age component leaving the Brent and Harrow Health Authority is the 24-44 year olds which comprise of 15,864 (47%) with children aged between 0-15 years accounting for 5,189 (15%). Inward migration accounted for 11,645 (24-44 year olds) (47%) and 3,486 (0-15 Year olds) (14%). In Hillingdon 5,819 (24-44 years olds) (41%) and 3,486 (0-15 Year olds) (24%) left Hillingdon. This would suggest that growing families and their aspirations continue to be a major reason for the outward pattern of suburban migration.

Although the National Health Register would suggest NWL is losing population this runs contrary to ONS evidence which suggest that apart from Harrow, inward migration is a net contributor to increasing the population of NWL. This discrepancy has been attributed to overseas immigration. The 1997-8 International Passenger Survey suggests that London gained 40,300 people. The majority of the migrants were from mainland Europe. However these international immigration figures exclude asylum seekers/visitor switches and movements to and from the Irish Republic. Precise figures are difficult to obtain but currently Brent has an estimated 13-15,000 asylum seekers (London Borough of Brent, 2000 p.2), London Borough of Hillingdon is providing housing for 1,526 asylum seekers (London Borough of Hillingdon, 2000b) and Harrow Local Education Authority has 1,643 refugee children registered (London Borough Harrow, 2001).

#### 5.4 Policy Implications

Although this data is far from conclusive, there is a clear trend regarding migration patterns in and around NWL broadly supporting Champion's earlier work. These findings have a number of implications with regard to planning for regeneration in the suburbs. In the first place, it appears that a growing number of born and bred 'Metro-landers' consider that the grass is greener outside London. In many respects this has always been the case, indeed as has been shown it was one of the major reasons why the interwar suburbs grew in the first place. However, unlike earlier times, for the past five years government policy has been actively promoting urban renaissance policies in London. These policies have yet to convince a significant number of citizens and especially families not to migrate further out from the suburbs. Indeed many of the breadwinners, as will be shown later, will continue to work in London but see outside London as providing a better place to bring up families. This would suggest that in terms of retaining existing populations, urban compaction policies in London are failing to address the expectations of suburban dwellers. Furthermore to compound

matters, the migration evidence suggests that the majority of those leaving NWL will continue to live in the crowded South and Eastern regions of the country thus putting more pressure on the recipient region's local resources and services.

However why do families in particular believe life is better outside London with longer commutes and the need to start again? Most surveys will show perceptions of crime, property prices and education are the main push factors whereas small market towns in particular offer new opportunities. Ironically many of these recipient towns have themselves growing problems including rising crime and drug related problems. Recent figures (Home Office Crime Statistics, 2002) suggest that some of these areas, due to the greater affluence of their populations, have higher drug related problems than the worst inner city estates. Moreover many of these towns lack the variety of activities which city life offers suburbanites.

Clearly there is one unspoken issue that lies behind much of the migration from the cities and most recently from the suburbs - ethnicity. Generally this is not the National Front type open bigotry, though there is an element of this. For many it is more to do with feeling part of a particular community. As young adults, many middle class white people will embrace the multi-cultural world by flocking to London for adventure. However when the time comes for them to settle down and have a family, more often than not they will look for schools and environments which reflect their values and Englishness. More affluent individuals will be able to live in fashionable districts and send their children to private or 'good' local state schools. However for the lower middle class, migration to the fringes of the city has and continues to be a common course of action.

One way to illustrate family migration is through data collected by the Local Education Authorities. The data profile for Harrow LEA 2000/2001 shows that between 1997 and 2001 although the overall number of school children

increased slightly from 27,262 to 27,617, the number of white children decreased by 1421 (-5.1%). More significantly the largest decline was at the primary school level where the number of white children decreased from 53.9 to 46.7% of the total. A small element of this could be attributed to falling birth rates but more significantly to outward migration or switching to private schools.

Such results begin to challenge the potential success of social inclusion policies. More importantly it raises the need to find ways to improve communications between all communities in the suburbs. The low-density nature of the suburbs can in many respects make this more difficult to achieve than equivalent higher density areas. Moreover although the increased diversity in global London provides many opportunities, the speed of change may itself be having an undermining effect upon its indigenous population both in terms of the ability for systems and individuals to respond to the changes in a positive way. The cult of the individual and consumerism so promoted during the Thatcherite years continues in the suburbs of NWL. For many of the white middle class their response has been to abandon the area, just as their grandparents and parents abandoned the city centre sixty years ago. A new type of Metroland Dream has emerged supported by the Sunday Supplements and sophisticated advertising. Instead of escaping the pollution and crime of London to live in a semi in suburbia they now search for a detached executive home with double garage, a barbecue and easy access to the motorway. As Sennett and Cobb (1972 p.163) comment; 'Whatever plateau of material circumstance a person achieves seems inadequate by comparison to the comforts of people who stand higher; he wants to like them, and so he moves on to consume more and more.'

However despite the drift of white people away from NWL, the suburbs have been and continue to be a vital component to the city. Indeed a further policy implication of the changing demography is that the growing

population of London is increasing the demand for land for housing, employment and amenity uses whilst at the same time placing greater pressure on the education, social, health and public transport services in the Capital. Indeed the GLA (2002a p.3) notes that ' A rapidly growing city cannot function on the resources of a smaller one.' This in itself creates two main issues. First suburbanites have been traditionally suspicious of land-use intensification outside the district centres. Secondly with significant numbers of Londoners continuing to leave, many of the traditional voluntary sectors and networks are being undermined just at a time when the demand on these services is increasing. Moreover stable populations which can build up and maintain networks over time are being replaced by a more transient population with only a short term or no interest in the places where they live. This ultimately isolates and alienates the remaining stable population further undermining the activity of suburban neighbourhoods.

The implications of the demographic changes mentioned above begin to illustrate some of the complexities involved in planning and regeneration in the suburbs. As Walker (in Dear and Scott, 1981 p.383) comments 'Part of the difficulty in making sense of suburbanization is the power of the myth that it can be defined in a purely geographic fashion, when, in fact, understanding spatial relations necessarily means confronting social relations as a whole.'

## **6. Housing**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The provision of sufficient suitable housing is a major theme when considering planning for regeneration in NWL. For the past seventy-five years the area has provided a mix of housing which has been both popular and flexible. In 2002 there remain a significant number of public housing estates though these tend to be concentrated closer to the centre for example at Stonebridge Park and South Acton. 80% of housing is owner-occupied, well above the 69% national average (ONS, 2000). However, in recent years a growing population, intensification of market forces and changing government policies have started to have a profound effect on the pattern of tenure, expectations and the environment of Metro-land.

### **6.2 Chapter Framework**

This chapter has three sections. The first part looks at the background to the current housing picture in terms of economic forces, population change and household formation. The second part explores the five main elements to today's housing problems. This includes affordability, accessibility, the quality of the stock, suitability and difficulties in attracting sufficient investment. The final section examines the type of government policies being adopted to tackle the housing problems, the way the housing issue is affecting perceptions of the area, and the impact these matters could have on future suburban regeneration.

Much of the data for this study has been collated from the recent housing surveys and strategies produced by the London Boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Harrow and Hillingdon supported with some longer term research carried out by London Residential Research and further data from H.M. Land Registry. Combined, these reports show that the growing pressures on the traditional homes of interwar suburbia are profoundly bound to the socio and economic changes which face London at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### 6.3 Economic Forces, Population Change and Household Formation

Traditionally the suburbs have been seen as a place where land is more affordable than at the centre. Alonso's, (1964) seminal work with bid rent curves has provided an economic means to help explain the location of different groups in cities. Using the concept of economic rent, the mechanism suggests that the reason why middle-income owners have congregated in the suburbs is the result of a balancing act between lower land prices and a potentially larger home against longer and more expensive journeys to work. Later work by Evans, 1973 re-enforced these themes by adding to the analysis the effects of income distribution and the different stages of the family cycle. By adding these themes, Evans was able to demonstrate the way different groups move in and out of areas of a city. When these factors are brought together, such a mechanism provides the economic reason as to why the suburbs of NWL grew with the Metropolitan Railway and why the populations continue to change.

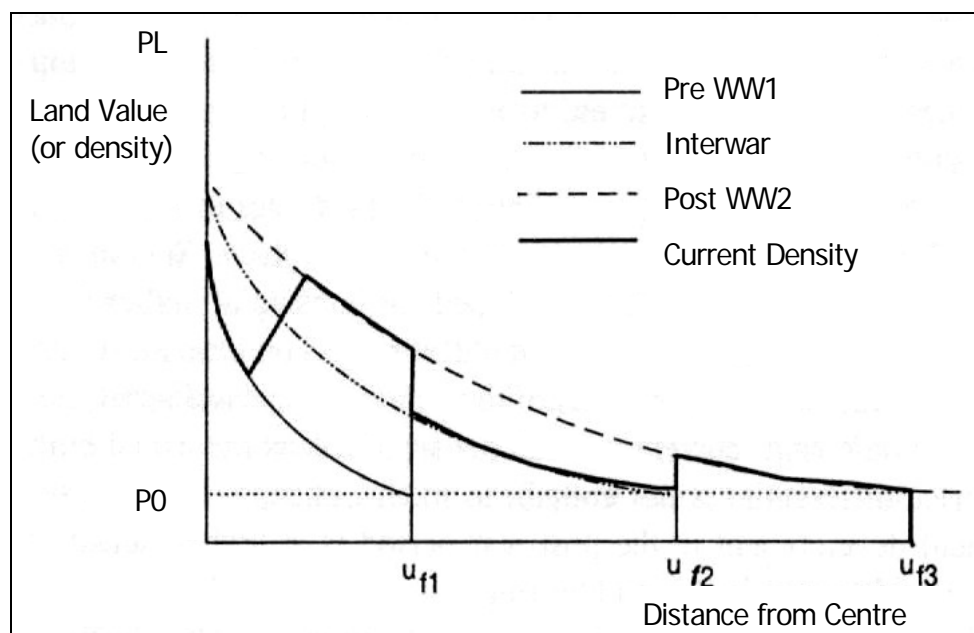
It has been argued that a number of today's housing problems in London, have been the product of earlier planning policies. Richardson, 1977 provided evidence that planning urban containment policies have contributed to increasing the price of land in the suburbs up to the margins of the greenbelt. This concept has been supported through the work of Bramley et al (1995 p.57)(Figure 6.1).

By using twentieth century UK historical evidence, Bramley et al identified three distinct periods in the development of housing density. In the pre-First World War phase, incomes were low and transport technology low resulting in the market rent function falling steeply from the centre. By the second inter-war phase, higher incomes and improved transport technology lead to a flattening of the gradient with the development of moderate density housing. In the third post Second World War phase, a more affluent mobile population accompanied by decentralizing commercial and industrial activity contributed to a further flattening of the rent gradient. The heavy

black line shown on Figure 6.1 demonstrates what happened over the period, linking land prices, land-use density, greenbelt legislation and the distance from the central business district.

As a result of this geo-historical pattern, certain areas located in the middle ring close to the greenbelt, such as Ruislip and Northwood, continue to be highly desirable and consequently expensive places to live. The proximity to the countryside, ease of journey to the City and West End and the low-density nature of the housing, have resulted in these areas commanding very high land prices. Furthermore the high housing costs have helped to establish strong vested interests among the owner-occupiers, who are keen to preserve the character of their areas and the amenities they currently enjoy.

Fig 6.1 Historical Development of Housing in Three Phases



Source: Bramley et al, (1995 p.57).

Thornley, (1992 p.20) points out that although there are such restrictive policies as greenbelts and that land is already in short supply, house builders have played a key role in keeping domestic property prices high by



building homes only where they can make the highest marginal returns whilst ignoring other less desirable sites. In NWL this has frequently meant piecemeal development on small plots of land.

Economic models may provide a useful tool in explaining the growth of the suburbs and the continued upward pressure on property prices but it is the scale of the expected increase in the demand for housing which will create the greatest challenge for London. The previous chapter demonstrated that NWL's population has expanded and is going to continue to grow for the foreseeable future. Although numerical increase is important, in terms of the pressure such change will put on existing resources, it is the number of household formations which will put greatest pressure on housing and the planning process. Work by the GLA (2002b) has shown that the number of households in NWL will increase from 414,000 in 2001 to 473,900 (12.6%) in 2016. The need to find an additional 59,900 homes in 14 years will be one of the major challenges.

This challenge is further complicated by the uneven spatial distribution of the anticipated increase in the number of households between boroughs. Although Harrow will have only an 8.9% increase, Brent will experience a 21% increase in the number of households. Ealing and Hillingdon will need to provide homes for a further 15.5% and 13% respectively of new households. This will create different pressures for the different boroughs in terms of the scale of development required and the resources which will need to be allocated. In the case of the inner boroughs the growing demand for housing can be met locally through densification and redevelopment of brownfield sites; similarly in the outer boroughs. However in the outer boroughs the availability of Metropolitan Open Land and other open spaces will create growing pressure from developers for planning approval for new housing on these potential sites.

Moreover population and household formation changes will vary within borough boundaries. This is going to be most marked in the London Borough of Hillingdon where Ickenham ward is due to lose 6.7% of its population whilst Yeading will gain 13% (Hillingdon, 2000b). The thinning out of populations in some areas and population growth in other areas will mean that Unitary Development Plans will need to address these issues through highly localised policies. Such fine spatial changes will need to be an important consideration in future regeneration initiatives.

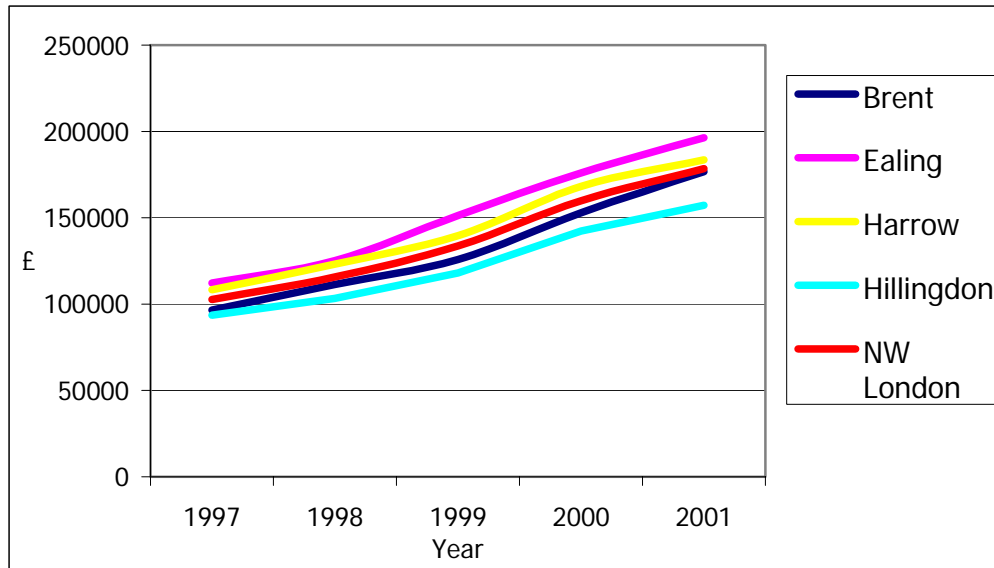
Equally important is the anticipated type of household formation. Unlike in the interwar period when families looking for healthy spaces were the *raison d'être* for the housing boom, since the mid 1980s, single person household formation has been the major contributor to the growing number of households (ONS, 1996). Indeed 80% of the expected growth in household formation will be single person households. Furthermore it is anticipated that whereas today 60% of single person households are female, by 2016 the 53% single person households will be male, primarily as a result of divorce (LDA, 2001).

Such growing and varying demands for housing will have a profound effect on an area of London which is already experiencing major problems in matching the demand for accommodation with the inelastic supply. This will be returned to later in the chapter.

#### 6.4 Problems - Affordability

Over the past five years the dramatic increase in the cost of housing throughout NWL has raised the question of housing affordability. Figure 6.2 shows the price increase for the average property.

Fig 6.2 Average House Price Change in NW London Suburbs 1997-2001



Source: H.M. Land Registry, 2002.

Data from H.M. Land Registry demonstrate that house prices for the year ending December 2001 show an 8.5% increase on the previous twelve months with the volume of sales remaining buoyant. However wages for the same period have only risen by 3% per annum. This means that for a 95% mortgage on an average price flat in Hillingdon priced at £108,885 in December 2001, a single person would require an income of £34,480 per annum. The average wage in the area is £25,653 per annum (SPA, 2002a). With house prices continuing to rise faster than wages, the situation is only going to become more desperate for first time buyers.

With many workers, including key workers, not earning enough to pay for a mortgage to buy even the most modest home in NWL, the matter of affordable housing has become a key theme in all the study boroughs' unitary development plans and housing strategies. Mayor Ken Livingstone has taken housing affordability a step further in the draft SDS (GLA, 2002c), by advocating that all new major housing developments should include a 50% affordable housing component. Indeed the London Development Agency consider housing affordability potentially one of the most significant

threats to the future prosperity of London with all sectors finding it increasingly difficult to recruit staff who are prepared to pay London housing costs (LDA, 2001).

Surprisingly the existing spiral in house prices is likely to persist. The growing population, inelastic supply of housing, low interest rates, lack lustre equity markets and the opening up of the 'buy-to-rent' market in recent years, has meant that property sales remain buoyant with sales averaging 20,840 homes per annum throughout NWL. Furthermore following the right-to-buy scheme of the eighties and nineties, 80% of all properties in NWL are owner-occupied (ONS, 2000). For those fortunate owners they will simply see the equity in their homes increase.

In the private rented sector, the high property prices have resulted in high rents. This frequently results in single people grouping together to pay the high rents in relation to income for poor accommodation (Whitehead, 1995 p.91). However with the opening up of the buy to rent market in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of properties coming onto the private rental market. The increased supply and inability of the market to sustain higher rents has helped to keep rents down. Unfortunately there has in Brent been a significant increase in levels of overcrowding (Brent, 2000 p.3) with properties in Wembley Central being six times more likely to be overcrowded than the national average.

## 6.5 Accessibility

Throughout the past twenty years government housing policy has been dominated by expanding owner-occupation and the privatisation of public sector housing. Apart from the most inner parts of the area, NWL has always been dominated by owner occupation. However the right to buy scheme and cut backs on public housing new build has resulted in a decline in the number of public sector/RSL properties. This has not only reduced the ease of access to social housing but with the growing universal demand

for housing has resulted in a greater dependency on the use of B&B accommodation and hostels. Such an emerging trend is contributing to greater social deprivation and social exclusion in the suburbs of NWL.

#### 6.6 The Quality of the Stock

There are two main themes connected with the quality of the housing stock, desirability and state of repair.

In terms of desirability many of the fifties and sixties social housing estates of the 'system build' type have become regarded as highly undesirable places to live. Following a number of cosmetic changes, a number of these estates are now being completely redeveloped as part of broader regeneration initiatives.

Although much of the social housing stock is undergoing major refurbishment and change, most of the area's housing is dominated by the private sector. Much of this housing is between sixty and eighty years old and is starting to reach a point where expensive maintenance programmes are becoming necessary. Overall only 8% of the private housing stock was built after 1964. In Ealing, research has shown that between 1999-2000 almost 6% of the local housing stock was unfit. This was just below the 6.2% national average. However in the private rental sector 12% of the properties were considered unfit. Much of this was due to the predominance of pre-1919 properties (36% of the total housing stock). But as the Ealing report says; 'Although this unfitness is substantially restricted to the oldest stock, there is a level of unfitness found in the interwar stock that needs to be given important consideration to prevent further deterioration.' (London Borough of Ealing, 2001 Annex B p.4). However the report also found a further 11% in a poor state of repair and again this appears to be mainly within the private rental sector.

In Brent the figures are worse with 15.9% of all dwellings considered unfit but this rose to 25% for private rental properties with a further 19.1% in a poor state of repair (Brent Council Housing Strategy, 2000 p.4). In Harrow it was found that only 4% of private homes failed the statutory fitness standard with a strong correlation being made with low-income households (66%). However as with Ealing, it was the pre-1919 housing especially in the Wealdstone area where 11% of all private properties were considered unfit. In London Borough of Hillingdon (2000a) the situation is less critical with only 4% of the properties being unfit. This is more to do with the smaller volume of older properties than the three inner boroughs.

Although much of today's poorest quality housing in terms of stock fitness and state of repair is associated with the pre-1919 properties there are signs that the level of unfit housing is starting to spread out away from the older established centres into the interwar suburbs. Despite the current low interest rates, high property prices have created the growing phenomenon of 'property rich-cash poor' homeowners, with many struggling to make the mortgage repayments. As a result little money is left over to maintain the properties. In view of the age of much of the housing stock in NWL and the growing need for extensive and expensive refurbishment, including new roofs, windows and drain replacement, the overall condition of the stock is likely to deteriorate. Overall it is anticipated that older more affordable areas will continue to see an overall deterioration, as growing numbers of owners will not be able or willing to invest in property maintenance. Potentially unless these areas become the new Islington of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and attract owners with the money and/or the skills to makeover these properties, the currently more affordable areas could become the new slums contributing to the overall deterioration of the suburban environment.

However if the former scenario was not serious enough the expansion of the private rented sector could aggravate the deterioration further. The evidence clearly demonstrates that this sector has the highest volume of

unfit housing and housing in a poor state of repair. Although traditionally low rates of return have been given as a reason for inadequate building maintenance in the rental sector, it appears, following research by the author (See Chapter ten) that this sector alone is accounting for up to 80% of the housing sales in inner NWL. With rent levels falling below mortgage levels and the demand for housing increasing, it will be tempting for many landlords to minimize maintenance costs. Moreover, as Green et al (1998) found, the growing rental sector is dominated by younger high turnover tenants who are prepared to put up with lower quality accommodation for the short term. Therefore it is anticipated that over time, these combined factors will accelerate the degradation of the overall housing stock.

The expansion of the rental market appears to be adopting a definite geographic pattern. The most favoured locations for buy to rent properties are small properties close to railway stations and major bus routes. These are generally some of the oldest properties in the district and in consequence are more likely to require expensive maintenance. Based on the evidence of the behaviour of some landlords, it will appear that these prime locations will be the first to start seeing, as indeed some already have, a marked deterioration in the overall suburban environment. Indeed there is some anecdotal evidence from Wembley that some landlords are buying up streets of once owner-occupied housing. This would suggest that some of the housing best served by public transport will become the prime areas for future overall decline. This process has already begun in Alperton and Wembley Central.

#### 6.7 Suitability of Housing

One of the major issues associated with housing is its suitability in terms of location and space. For nearly a century low-density owner-occupier housing has been the primary feature of suburban NWL. The post-war period saw an increase in the variety of smaller housing types and public sector provision but even today 57% of the current housing stock in Harrow

and Hillingdon remains semi or detached properties (London Borough of Harrow, 2000, London Borough of Hillingdon, 2000a).

At the time of their construction these small interwar houses were well suited for families. However since the 1960s changing attitudes to marriage, divorce, family structures, aging populations and alternative lifestyles, coupled with growing affluence, has created a new set of demands and expectations for residential accommodation in the area. Today household size in NWL remains steady at between 2.4 and 2.52 persons (ONS, 2000), significantly above the 2.32 persons across London. It would appear therefore that the expected growth in population and increase in the number of smaller households would require an increase in the supply of more smaller properties at higher densities. However it should be noted that not all smaller households necessarily desire less accommodation. For example many divorced couples and grandparents will continue to need additional accommodation for when their children/grandchildren come to stay, other more affluent smaller one or two person households may simply want space. So a compromise will need to be achieved with varying sizes of new accommodation being supplied.

However the size of household units changes over time. High house prices in relation to income and high transaction costs are reducing the level of fluidity in the domestic property market in NWL, contributing to overcrowding in some cases and under occupancy in others. Moreover unless there is an adequate supply of larger affordable properties, there will be little let up in the migration out of London discussed in chapter five.

Part of the housing suitability issue is the question of location. Ealing's desirability as a place to live has resulted in the area becoming a magnet for the more affluent. This has resulted in poorer local first time buyers having to look elsewhere for a place to live resulting in the dislocation of their family and personal networks. At the same time, some affluent areas



like Ickenham have a declining, elderly, population who continue to live in large family homes, whilst the second and third generations often need to move away from the area to more affordable locations. This means that the Ickenhams of Metro-land are running counter to the land-use intensification and urban compaction desired by government.

Closely related to the question of suitability is the matter of personal aspirations. Although demographic factors show that there will be an increase in the number of smaller households over the next fourteen years, it would be a mistake to assume that the housing market should predominantly supply greater volumes of small units at higher densities. Although this will help to provide basic housing needs Hedges and Clemens (1994, p.156) showed that 83% of people preferred houses to flats and that there was an inverse relationship between housing density and area satisfaction. As Breheny (1997 p.215) comments; 'There is, it seems, a direct conflict between the views of dedicated compactionists, who promote the virtues of high-density urban living, and humble consumers, who have persistently voted for the opposite, still expressing a preference for decentralized spacious living.'

Interestingly, one area where market forces are dealing with the matter of housing suitability is house extensions. Cheaper loans, rising property prices and high transaction costs has resulted in a boom in the house extension market in NWL over the past three years with the number of extensions exceeding the previous boom in 1989 (ODPM, 2002b). This not only helps to reduce over crowding and meet aspirational space requirements but also illustrates the flexibility of the humble semi as a successful housing unit.

Despite the boom in house extensions, there remains a significant mismatch of space requirements and household size in NWL. Although growing affluence has resulted in smaller households living in large properties, there is growing evidence of overcrowding in poorer communities which is

aggravated by a severe shortage of four or more bedroom properties in the social housing sector. Furthermore in the private housing sector many won't extend their houses preferring instead to move out of London where property prices are cheaper and their aspirations can be fulfilled more easily.

#### 6.8 Investment

Despite repeated Government attempts to promote greater investment in housing, overall housing completions remain low across NWL with only 5,408 completions between January 1998 and July 2001 (GLA, 2002d). Brownhill et al (1990) and Kleinman (1991) have attributed this to the reduction in public housing provision. A more recent suggestion from the RTPI (Channel 4 News 8/5/02) is that the housing construction industry is partly to blame for the lowest level of output since 1924. By restricting the supply of new housing, prices will continue to rise thereby increasing the value of the land banks owned by the major developers. This argument was first challenged by Grigson, 1986, who considered that housing prices were determined by demand rather than supply, because new-build is only a tiny part of the total supply and cannot adapt quickly to major demand fluctuations.

On the other hand, Evans, 1988, suggests that the planning system by restricting the total supply of land would in the longer term raise prices and densities. This is supported by the House Builders Federation, (GLA, 2002d) who add that the longevity of the decision-making process is a further reason for the current malaise in new starts. The HBF would like to see an increase in the supply of land for housing, most notably on the greenbelt, (Channel 4 News 8/5/02). Moreover the HBF would prefer to see a relaxation of the need to redevelop all brownfield sites in London before moving onto greenfield sites thus avoiding expensive decontamination, accessibility and liability costs.

Unfortunately this argument fails to deal with the growing housing shortage in NWL at a time when there are increasing levels of deprivation and social exclusion. As the GLA, (2000d p. 49) comment 'The low supply of social rented homes over many years has led to a serious backlog of unmet need, which is reflected both in record numbers of people living in temporary accommodation, and in the growing logjam in social housing.' As Merrett, (1982 p.322) wrote, 'The elimination of housing poverty requires action on the terrain of the appropriation of land, the production of new dwellings and the rehabilitation of existing ones, the supply of realisation and transfer finance, the allocation of vacancies and the provision of consumption subsidies.' Such issues are a major consideration for many suburban regeneration initiatives.

#### 6.9 Government Policy

In the Urban Task Force Report, 1999 Lord Rogers of Riverside commented that, 'We need a vision that will drive the urban renaissance. We believe that cities should be well designed, be more compact and connected ... allowing people to live, work and enjoy themselves at close quarters within a sustainable urban environment which is well integrated with public transport and adaptable to change.' This view has been reflected in the Urban White Paper, (DETR, 2000f), the Housing Green Paper 'Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All', (DETR, 2000a), 'The Way Forward for Housing', (DETR, 2001a), Policy Planning Guidance 3 for Housing (DETR, 2000d) and PPG 13 for Transport (DETR, 2001). The central theme in all these documents is the need to re-use existing brownfield sites and build housing which is well designed at a higher density. In London, the need to increase affordable housing provision is accentuated by the growing population and is outlined in the draft SDS, (GLA, 2002c). Moreover following the Housing Green Paper, (DETR, 2000a) local authorities now have to develop a strategic role in housing, separate from their traditional council housing landlord role.

### 6.10 Perceptions

The majority of local residents remain happy with their homes in Metroland. Areas such as Northwood and Pinner remain highly desirable places to live with their leafy lanes and well-manicured lawns. However the anticipated increase in the number of homes required and pressure on different sites, especially in the inner areas means that larger proposals are becoming increasingly met with hostility from local residents. In Wembley (May 2002) local residents have gone as far as a judicial review in an attempt to delay the redevelopment of part of the former Hurst Research Centre in East Lane, as a mixed tenure housing development. Such intensification is often regarded as 'over-development' and considered unsuited to the suburban environment.

Indeed the question of whether to integrate the inner suburbs into the inner urban core by adopting similar levels of land-use or to let Metro-land continue as a low to medium level land-use entity is potentially the most crucial factor which those advocating compact city policies have chosen to gloss over. For many suburbanites the urban renaissance will simply mean more flats where there were once houses, more crowding where there was once open space. Clearly a more positive role for the suburbs needs to be defined which will balance housing needs and aspirations.

### 6.11 Housing and Regeneration

In terms of regeneration and revitalization of the suburbs the current policies are generally to be welcomed but only if they contribute to a successful overall improvement in the housing environment. Although there are new policies to bring empty housing back into use including flats above shops, grants for housing improvements and specific funds for regenerating run down social housing estates, it has only recently been acknowledged that more action is required in the suburbs (DETR, 2000f).

At present virtually all the housing regeneration schemes focus on the larger social housing estates. This is only to be expected with their high levels of deprivation, inherent design problems and history of neglect. However private sector estates as has been shown in this chapter, are starting to deteriorate. There are many cases of 'Jerry Built' houses most notably in Alperton and South Harrow (Jackson, 1991). The time is approaching when larger scale regeneration projects will need to be considered which could provide higher density accommodation. In the Brent Supplementary Planning Guidance 17, (London Borough of Brent, 2001 p.11) higher density housing is positively encouraged within 600 metres of tube and railway stations. By attempting to steer development in this way some of the oldest poorer quality accommodation could be upgraded into a higher quality, more sustainable urban form. This may well be one way forward for meeting the rising demand for housing in the suburbs of NWL whilst at the same time striking a balance between the desire to achieve a compact city whilst maintaining much of the traditional suburban environment.

In conclusion, with the growing population and the expected increase in the volume of household formations, NWL is having to cope with the largest number of newcomers since the end of the Second World War. Lack of social and affordable housing will put great pressure on local authorities to provide extra accommodation. At the same time a careful balance needs to be established with the need to increase housing densities whilst retaining the suburban character of the area. Already there have been incidences of NIMBY action to prevent development and the indications are that this is likely to intensify. However increased housing supply is not the only issue facing the area. Already a number of the sixties estates are being redeveloped which in itself is having repercussions on the surrounding areas. However the time is approaching when growing volumes of older deteriorating privately owned housing will need to be rebuilt on a similar scale.

## **7. Deprivation**

### **7.1 Introduction**

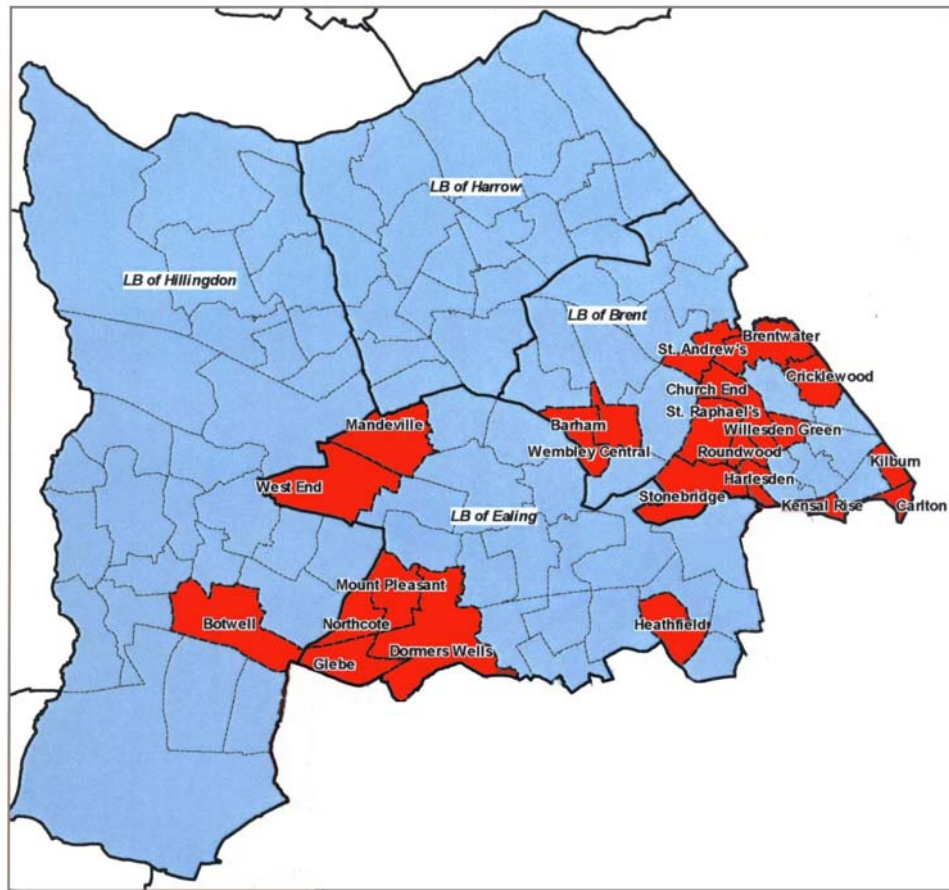
Over the past thirty years it has become evident that a number of the leafy suburbs of NWL have started to see an increase in the levels of deprivation (See Figure 7.1). This chapter is first going to look at the way deprivation has begun to manifest itself in NWL. Secondly it will look at the way the current measures of deprivation fail to represent the types of problems which are occurring. The third part will look at the impact such measurements are having in terms of regeneration and renewal initiatives.

### **7.2 The Shape of Deprivation**

There are currently three basic patterns of deprivation in the suburbs of NWL. The first is in the higher density public housing projects of the 1960s, the second is in the older, smaller pre-1919 terraced streets and the third is a more dispersed pocket form of deprivation.

Often the worst recorded levels of deprivation in NWL are noted in the 1960s higher density blocks of flats. Through a mixture of poor design and construction, poor maintenance, societal breakdown, increase in drug related crime, and two decades of government policy which has treated council housing as a residual, have combined to concentrate poverty in these estates. Those who could afford to leave were encouraged to do so leaving local housing managers with little choice but to put more of the most deprived households in the most unpopular estates. As a result these estates have become the accommodation of last resort (See Ravetz, 2001). Furthermore the high levels of local crime, unemployment and low incomes have helped to drive out local shops and services resulting in their communities becoming increasingly isolated in a downward spiral of deprivation excluded from mainstream society.

Fig 7.1 Most Deprived Wards in North West London (2000)



**(NOTE:** The named wards (shown in red) are among the 20% most deprived wards in England in terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000)).

The size and population of these public sector flat developments tends to show up in ward level deprivation indicators. As a result Chalkhill, St. Raphael's and Stonebridge are, according to the Index of Deprivation 2000, among the most deprived 10% of the 8,414 wards in England. In many respects the factors behind the poor scores are typical of classic inner city problems and as a result require large-scale initiatives to help break the cycle of decline.

The second case where suburban deprivation is becoming increasingly evident is in the pre-1919 private terraced housing. Wards such as Alperton, Wembley Central and Wealdstone have significant amounts of this type of accommodation but don't attract the same levels of government assistance for multiple deprivation which occur in the sixties estates due in part to the dilution of deprived households at ward level of aggregation.

The third spatial manifestation of suburban decline is the numerous pockets of deprivation. In population and geographical terms these pockets are below ward level and often comprise of the equivalent of one or two census enumeration districts. They may be centred on smaller former public housing estates or the less accessible/desirable lower end private sector accommodation. In many respects these pockets, despite being in a large urban area, remain, from a less fortunate resident's point of view, isolated. Some of the accommodation on the Headstone Lane Estate in Harrow (Figure 4.2 p.54) remains remote to those without a car and on limited incomes.

### 7.3 Deprivation Indicators and Their Limitations

The ID2000 was based on multivariate data for the 8,414 wards in England. There were six domains, which included data for income, employment, health, housing, education and accessibility to services using 33 indicators. A seventh sub-domain was generated for child poverty based on income data (See DETR, 2000b, 2000c and DTLR 2001b).

Even with an appreciation of the need to find robust nationwide data there are, from a suburban regeneration angle, three weaknesses with the overall construction of multiple deprivation indices.

The first is that due to the lack of reliable and nationwide consistent data for both crime and the state of the physical environment, these indicators were left out from the analysis. Although this is understandable and the



authors mention the need to address these weaknesses, as far as the suburbs are concerned these are two vital sets of data which could have a profound effect on the way the suburbs are shown. As this thesis is demonstrating, the state of the physical environment and the perceptions of criminal activity are not only essential indicators to illustrate patterns of deprivation but are vital to help explain the problems which exist in NWL and why there remains a continuing outward migration.

One of the omitted domains is any indicator for the lack/limited English Language skills. In NWL this is an important consideration which in itself could be a fundamental contributor to the growing levels of deprivation and isolation in the area.

The second issue, which inherently weakens the data from a suburban point of view, is the allocated weightings in the overall index of deprivation. Income and employment both receive a 25% weighting, health and education 15% and housing and accessibility 10%. However in London with its fast growing population, housing is a primary concern; extreme overcrowding has placed Wembley Central as the 22<sup>nd</sup> most deprived ward in terms of housing in England. Alperton at 95, Queensbury at 148, Preston at 365 and Wealdstone at 423 demonstrate only too clearly the rippling out of housing deprivation from Inner London. Moreover, although it is fully understandable why accessibility is such a vital issue outside London, its significance is far more limited than the 10% weighting it received from a London point of view.

The third weakness of the ID2000 is the dependency on large ward areas for the analysis. The whole analysis is based on the explicit theory that deprivation is essentially a clustering problem and thus disregards dispersed deprivation completely. In the 'Outside Looking In' (London Borough of Harrow, 2002, p.3), the author comments that; 'Suburbs are meant to be pleasant, green and leafy places. In part they are, but there are pockets,

often smaller than whole wards, which are already locked in a spiral of decline: rising crime, low skills levels, poor access to public transport and crumbling infrastructure. These pockets are isolated, surrounded by more affluent areas, but with poorer health, worse school results, and higher numbers on benefit.' Adopting smaller spatial units, such as enumeration districts, could highlight dispersed deprivation. Moreover, it would both help to focus resource allocation to currently excluded communities and would ensure that regeneration funding is concentrated into specific zones within ward boundaries. Furthermore unlike the current ward-based approach, a micro approach could help to identify the subtleties of rippling deprivation and the emergence of larger scale problems. Funding carefully targeted in the early stages could both help those most in need now but more significantly could help to minimise any intensification and geographical expansion of deprivation in the future. This would provide a more cost effective long-term solution and would help to overcome a major problem of throwing large amounts of money in a limited time where there are shortages of skilled personnel to undertake the tasks expected of them.

#### 7.4 Deprivation Indices and Regeneration

Although there are inherent weaknesses in the way the deprivation indices have been constructed, from a suburban regeneration point of view, the potential impact in terms of attracting regeneration and renewal investment is far more significant. There are three ways in which the indices can undermine suburban regeneration. The first is related to the way indices exclude areas from funding, the second is connected with the impact housing regeneration schemes can have on neighbouring areas and the third is associated with private sector investment.

#### 7.5 Deprivation Indices and Area Exclusion

Virtually all successful regeneration bids use the deprivation indices as a powerful tool to demonstrate the state of an area. In so doing they form a key element in the basic analysis. Although the Neighbourhood Renewal

Strategy illustrates the type of criteria which would assist in successful funding bids, the bid area must either be in or its boundary fall substantially within the 10% most deprived wards in the country as measured by the deprivation indices. This requirement effectively eliminates all but six wards in NWL (5 in Brent and 1 in Ealing) from regeneration funding.

Consequently, the same wards continue to benefit from more regeneration funding despite having already received substantial City Challenge and/or Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Funding over the past ten years. As a result of this index requirement, smaller declining neighbouring areas, whose problems don't extend to high enough proportions within their wards, will fail, under the current system, to attract any significant regeneration funding.

Through the inherent weaknesses of deprivation indices formation and reliance on them for regeneration strategies, the majority of suburban areas will fail to attract any funding to help overcome any area based deprivation problems unless they are linked to another initiative such as a health or education based scheme.

#### 7.6 Deprivation Indices and Housing Regeneration

The second way the deprivation indices can undermine neighbouring areas in NWL is through their usage to achieve large scale housing regeneration. As was seen in the chapters five and six the population in London is continuing to grow with an upward demand for more smaller accommodation. Since 1997 Brent has successfully achieved funding to rebuild three major 'problem' housing estates at Chalkhill, Stonebridge and Church End. Each one of these was in wards with high levels of deprivation.

With so much housing being demolished to make way for the new schemes, large numbers of tenants were being re-housed in temporary private rental sector housing in the north of the borough. This had three effects on the

neighbouring areas. First it put great pressure on local resources in the north of the borough. Secondly it shifted significant levels of deprivation from amongst the displaced tenants into already problematic areas in the north. Third the visible deterioration in the environment and local services coupled with an alarming increase in drug/gun related crime encouraged more owner-occupiers to leave the area. This occurred just at the time when investors were switching into the private domestic rental sector. When all these factors were combined Wembley Central and Alperton slipped deeper into a cycle of decline. Consequently, in the May 2002 elections, all three Labour Councillors probably lost their seats in Wembley Central as a result of the neglect the area had suffered and the problems which had been created. From a regeneration point of view, the area had deteriorated so much that as Andrew Blowers, the Head of Brent Regeneration advised the author (27/05/02) that for the first time Wembley Central was able to promote itself for regeneration funding other than having to rely on Wembley Stadium/Wembley Park SRB initiatives.

#### 7.7 Deprivation Indices and Private Investment

The third problem with deprivation indices is that not only do the same areas attract public funds but in some cases, through different forms of partnership, deprived areas can attract significant levels of private investment too. Indeed this is often a key aim of partnership formation and is seen as an essential way of boosting government regeneration attempts. This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of public private partnership or the desire of some area based regeneration organisations to sustain themselves for as long as possible, but it does mean that funding tends to be pumped into the same areas again and again. At the same time marginal areas, such as those in NWL with lower overall levels of deprivation, miss out from both public and private sector investment. However if the smaller centres of NWL are to play a more active role in helping to regenerate and revitalize suburbia some seedbed funding is an important ingredient in terms of helping to develop clear objectives, attract

key investors and devise clear strategies. At present the significance of deprivation indices frequently undermines many suburban regeneration strategies.

## 7.8 Conclusion

Although the Government is keen to promote an Urban Renaissance and a Better Quality of Life for all, the reliance on deprivation indices which are both fundamentally flawed as far as suburban regeneration is concerned and even contribute to undermining the chances for marginal areas to renew themselves, illustrates the continued indifference to the suburbs still evident in certain sectors. However as the Head of Harrow Regeneration, Claire Codling (21/6/02) told the author, if the London Suburban Boroughs had just 5% of the regeneration funding allocated for the inner boroughs, most of the declining pockets could be reversed. In the long term this would be a cheaper option than the large-scale regeneration schemes currently underway in Inner London. It would benefit a larger proportion of deprived communities which currently remain excluded through the very systems that are meant to help them. Moreover micro-scale intervention now would help prevent dispersed pockets forming into larger deprived areas in the future.

## 8. Town Centres

### 8.1 Introduction

A key area where NWL can contribute to and benefit from the urban renaissance is in the future of the local town centres. Unlike the suburbs of North America which generally lack specific centres other than shopping malls (Downs, 1973), many of the centres of NWL were focused on older villages with their own local distinctiveness. This has helped to produce a sense of identity around localised historic cores. Even the newly built interwar public transport suburbs referred to by Gwilliam et al (1998) have, sixty years on, managed to develop their own sense of identity, as reflected in the town centre sections of the NWL boroughs' unitary development plans. Indeed Mumford (1954 p.266) saw the 'neighbourhood unit' as the only practical answer to the giantism and inefficiency of the over-centralized metropolis.'

Some like Keller (1968) have argued that the relationship between the neighbourhood and the larger city is unclear with people travelling across the city for work and establishing social networks. Moreover it has been argued, that this relationship has been further eroded by the motorcar and telecommunications, (See Madanipour, 2001). However, in London the success, vitality and inclusiveness of the suburban centres is essential if the city is going to be able to maintain its expected population growth in a sustainable and prosperous manner, as befits a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global city. In Towards a London Plan it is noted that 'Town centres have an important role in helping to make London an exemplary world city...they are the focus for local communities and [provide] a sense of place and identity in what can be an anonymous conurbation.'(GLA, 2001 pp. 84-85).

This chapter introduces the role of town centres as focal points for regeneration and renewal in NWL and acts as the foundation for the fieldwork phase of the thesis. It first looks at how the town centres of NWL

first originated and the type of forces which have been bringing change over the past seventy years. Second it questions the importance of these centres and whether they should have a more significant role. The third section considers the role town centres could play in terms of regeneration and renewal stemming from the Government's belief in maintaining and improving these centres.

## 8.2 Town Centres and Change

When the suburbs of NWL were first built, the developers realised the need to extend or provide centres which could supply the daily needs for the growing population. A number of these centres were extensions to older villages such as Pinner and Ruislip but others such as Rayners Lane and Ruislip Manor were a product of the transport led suburban growth.

With the majority of early residents coming from Inner London, with its wide range of facilities, there was a strong expectation for the growing centres to provide a similar range of services including churches, synagogues, health centres, libraries and pubs. Cinemas in particular were considered a key requirement for a successful new suburb (See Skinner, 2002). Every district centre had at least one cinema.

However changing lifestyles and developments in the retail and leisure sectors have played a fundamental role in the vitality and viability of many suburban centres. Traditionally many suburban housewives stayed at home during the day. With few private cars and limited domestic refrigeration, shopping for food was a daily chore which was generally restricted to the closest local High Street, thereby minimising long struggles home by foot with bags of shopping or the distances for those tradesmen who did deliver. Other local shops and services benefited from this arrangement, and consequently during the interwar period branches of High Street names such as Woolworth and Boots appeared in many of the local parades of NWL (Baren, 1996 and Smailes, 1944). As a result, during the 1950s with

growing disposable incomes for the 'Never had it so good generation' of Harold MacMillan, many parades were extended, or were partially redeveloped to make way for larger stores.

By the 1960s, the expansion of car ownership and the widespread availability of fridges and later freezers, meant that growing numbers of housewives didn't need to shop on a daily basis, instead they chose to shop weekly at the new supermarkets using the family car. As a result the writing was on the wall for the once thriving chrome plated shopping parades. Their growing physical obsolescence, shallow retail units and lack of adequate rear servicing and storage facilities made them an increasingly unattractive option for major retailers. By the 1990s mass car ownership, women working full time and the growth of large retail parks such as Victoria Park in Ruislip and out of centre multiplex cinema/entertainment complexes like Park Royal had fundamentally undermined the vitality of many of the traditional suburban centres.

Some of the major centres successfully adjusted to the changes. During the 1960s, realising the detrimental impact the growing volumes of traffic were having in the shopping districts, Watford, Harrow and Uxbridge started to reroute their road systems from through to around the town centres. However following the success of the Brent Cross Shopping Centre (opened 1976), it became apparent by the 1980s that the combined demands for better facilities from car-owning consumers and retailers coupled with a willingness of the market to invest in the growing retail and entertainment market, was seeing a fundamental change in the shopping experience. Partly out of fear for new out of town shopping centres coupled with an appreciation of the need to improve the existing centres, Watford, followed by Harrow and later Uxbridge began to develop strategies for fundamental changes to their centres. By working together, local councils, major developers and financial institutions produced clear attainable strategies. Through the use of compulsory purchase orders to help parcel land, new



shopping malls and entertainment complexes were built in the heart of these centres. Traffic was kept away from the centres, new service roads were built, public transport interchanges were improved and extensive pedestrianisation of these once traffic congested areas was made possible. Today these centres each possess a Town Centre Manager and various partnership forums, such as the 'Uxbridge Initiative', which aim to promote and encourage suitable development.

One of NWL's major centres was left behind, Wembley. Unlike the London Boroughs of Harrow and Hillingdon which had only one major centre, Brent had Kilburn, Willesden and Wembley. Through the sixties Wembley had been thriving, with the construction of several modern shops and a Central Square. However following the shift of political power to the south of the new borough of Brent in 1965, leafy suburban Wembley appeared reasonably affluent compared with the inner Brent districts. It failed to attract funding for a bypass road in 1970 but it was the opening of Brent Cross in 1976 which was to fundamentally weaken Wembley's long-term position.

Although improvement schemes have generally helped the larger centres to adjust to the changing needs and expectations of consumers and service providers and thereby maintain their hierarchical position in London's Town Centre Network (See Hall, Marshall and Lowe, 2001); it is the district and neighbourhood centres which have often been left behind. Many have failed to attract any significant new investment. Others have, over the past ten years, seen large supermarkets locate in or close to their centres. This has brought mixed blessings in terms of the overall vitality of the centre. Some such as Pinner and Kingsbury have adjusted and coped with the change (but in very different ways) whereas Kenton has slipped further into decline, (This issue will be returned to in chapter nine). The overall result is that a number of centres, by failing to change with the times, have consolidated their position with others slipping into a spiral of decline. In a number of

cases such as Wealdstone and Wembley, the decline has been accompanied by growing levels of local deprivation.

However it is these traditional centres built around the railway stations and public transport routes of NWL which could potentially provide the basis of a bottom up region wide spatial framework for local regeneration. Already these neighbourhood centres continue to provide local services which are accessible without the need of having to make car journeys. In NWL their unique position in relation to the public transport infrastructure will continue to provide a major reason why they shouldn't be allowed to stagnate and fail. Indeed district and neighbourhood centre regeneration could both help local suburban residents whilst at the same time providing opportunities for additional housing provision at higher densities for London as a whole.

### 8.3 Arguments Against Suburban Town Centre Regeneration

However there are three issues that need to be addressed before embarking on a detailed analysis of the smaller centres. The first is the question why, in the case of declining centres, should suburban Londoners bother turning these areas around when they have already chosen to go elsewhere for their goods and services? The second issue is generally more applicable to the more successful smaller centres where the 'Not-in-my-back-yard' (NIMBY) residents are happy with the status quo and are opposed to change on the grounds that it would harm the amenities they currently enjoy. The third would develop strategies for the new centres such as the retail parks and shopping malls.

The first argument stems from the fact that NWL is located in one of the World's most extensive and diverse consumer markets. The anti-local-centre lobby would contest that the days of the local facilities are numbered. Most smaller centres provide only very limited services and products whereas larger centres, mail order and the Internet offer a far wider range of choice. However this argument fails to address the societal need for such places as

local centres of interaction and identity. They continue to provide essential services especially for those on low incomes, women left at home all day without a car minding children, the elderly and those with disabilities. They continue to provide vital top up shopping trips for local commuters. Most significantly these centres are accessible by foot and are not car dependent. They provide local jobs in a variety of sectors, not just retailing.

In many respects it is these smaller suburban centres which are precisely the type of place which the Urban Task Force Report would like to see improved. In 'A Better Quality of Life' (DETR, 1999 p.64) the Government consider that 'Thriving regions, cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods are fundamental to quality of life. Strong economies, employment opportunities, good access to services, and attractive and safe surroundings are vital for their sustainable development. We need to achieve these in ways which make good use of natural resources, protect the environment and promote social cohesion.' The combined facilities of these smaller centres, coupled with their local sense of identity and strong public transport links makes them an essential resource which should according to Government Policy be encouraged, not be abandoned.

The second NIMBY argument regarding the need to diversify and develop even stable district and neighbourhood centres fails to accept the reality of London's growing population. As already discussed in Chapter five London's growing population and even faster increase in the number of households is exerting growing and conflicting demands for land. The need to find sustainable solutions, which would not entail the loss of Metropolitan Open Land and Green Belt, raises the dilemma of where everybody can be housed and services located. The well-served public transport centres of NWL with their diverse range of services have their part to play in accommodating these changes. By accommodating the expected increase in population in these centres not only would it help to keep London compact but if done sympathetically would help improve the vitality and viability of these

localities. If on the other hand it is done without a clear plan and without the support of the local community, it could store up even more problems for the future.

The third argument would like to see the new retail parks and shopping malls play a more prominent civic role. Their expansion over the past twenty years has had a profound effect on shopping habits and has impacted on the retail function of many of the smaller traditional district and local centres (Bromley and Thomas, 1993). The larger units with their greater retail floor and storage space provide opportunities for retailers to stock larger ranges and numbers of items. Purpose built delivery areas can handle large supply trucks and the availability of plenty of free car parking, helps to make these new centres highly attractive both to retailers and shoppers.

Unlike traditional centres, these newer complexes tend to be home for specialist providers whose market is not only limited to the immediate local communities. For example, the Tesco Superstore and IKEA store at Brent Park may fulfil many of the day-to-day needs for local people from the neighbouring St Raphael's and Stonebridge Park estates and even employ many people from the local communities but these shops are not dependent on the immediate neighbourhood. The stores' customers come from a far wider geographical area, especially in the case of IKEA. Hence in market terms the local community makes up only a very small fraction of store sales. Section 106 agreements may bring some much needed local community and environmental improvements but at the end of the day the retail parks have not diversified to provide the multitude of services typical of the traditional centre. A community notice board by the checkouts, the provision of recycling facilities and charity collecting tins may provide a corporate form of neighbourliness but it doesn't mean that marketing on its own can create integrated communities.

At present these developments remain purely retail units. However they have the potential to evolve. The longer opening hours of these stores with their bright lighting and security have transformed the way people shop over the past ten years. From the author's observations, the recently opened 20,000m<sup>2</sup> Asda Store in Wembley Park (1998) is busy both in the daytime and evenings. More significantly, due to its location in a mixed residential area, it is increasingly acting as a focal and meeting point for local people. Many retail parks are well served by public transport and no doubt much accommodation could be fitted above the low level buildings and a wide range of services including libraries and medical centres added. Indeed there are currently a number of studies being undertaken in this emerging field (DTLR, 2002a and Tesco/GLA/Housing Corporation (forthcoming 2002)).

However the majority of the older centres continue to have unique qualities. The sizes of many of the retail units in the old smaller centres are too small for most High Street names but they are ideal for small businesses. As a result many traditional centres have a diverse range of businesses supplying a wide range of convenient products and services for local communities and passers by. The personal service, contact with local people, inclusiveness, availability of community facilities and proximity to home helps to create and re-enforce a sense of spatial identity for local people and visitors which retail parks predominantly fail to achieve.

#### 8.4 District and Local Centres

In attempting to meet the demands for a growing population, changing lifestyles and aging infrastructure, the district and local centres of NWL have the potential to play a key role as foci for regeneration. This needs to be explored at three different levels, the local, neighbourhood and network level.

## 8.5 Regeneration and Revitalisation

However before continuing, it is useful to consider the terms 'regeneration' and 'revitalisation'. In many respects they are very similar but for the purposes of this study regeneration is used in connection with the declining centres. These are the places which generally have a deteriorating environment, failing services demonstrated by significant numbers of empty retail and business units and higher levels of deprivation. In addition to physical interventions there would be specialist re-training for work and fresh start programmes for local people. Revitalisation is intended to relate to the consolidating centres where there is potential to increase the numbers of people living and using these centres. This would involve appropriate levels of mixed-use intensification, diversification of services and general improvements to the streetscape. Potentially the scale of physical intervention could be as great in the revitalising centres as in the regenerating ones. However as the recent Urban White Paper, (DETR, 2000f p.129) commented; 'There is no single solution to improving towns and cities, whether building on success or rejuvenating less successful areas. One of the strongest lessons from the past is that policies and programmes need to be comprehensive and tailored to circumstance.'

## 8.6 Regeneration Foci at the Local Level

At the local level, small centres provide a strong sense of identity, acting like village centres within Greater London. The high quality public transport provision and availability of local services are fundamental strengths which make them key candidates as foci for suburban regeneration and revitalisation. Until now most recent investment has been spent in the inner city. The diversification of services and provision of more homes and jobs could add to the vitality and viability of the smaller suburban centres. This would encourage more people to stay local, help spread the additional housing provision across the city and thereby reduce the need to travel. However for local centres to be successful foci for regeneration it is essential that any regeneration or revitalisation attempt be carried out with

the support and involvement of the local people. Failure to do so will only backfire with local people continuing to migrate from the area undermining local communities thereby putting greater pressure on towns outside London.

#### 8.7 Regeneration Foci at the Neighbourhood Level

At the neighbourhood level the district and local centres are useful foci for regeneration. The problem with suburbia is that housing developments which focus on one centre merge into others. It would also be a mistake to think that all suburbs had local centres. Indeed when the more remote housing estates were being built in the thirties, estate agents would arrange to pick prospective buyers up from the station and drive them to their new home, giving the impression that the house was close to the station and local centre. On the whole though NWL has a good spread of local centres which serve their local neighbourhoods. Regenerating and revitalising the centres could see the benefits spread across the neighbourhoods.

By encouraging local people to play a proactive role in any regeneration and revitalisation scheme, such a sympathetic approach could help to improve smaller centres' vitality and viability. Whereas residents in some areas are strongly opposed to change, in Harrow, the South Harrow Residents Association has been very active in trying to get funding to improve their centre (Thomas, 2001). As a result it appears that although the London Borough of Harrow receives only very limited regeneration funding, South Harrow is now being considered (with Rayners Lane) for the next centres to see clear strategies being developed (Claire Codling 21/6/02). By persuading more people to welcome change it could result in the expansion of locally orientated opportunities. This would help to provide more people with a local sense of identity referred to earlier in the draft SDS.

## 8.8 Regeneration Foci at the Regional/Network Level

At the regional level, the town centres form part of an interconnected network of centres across London (LPAC, 1996). At any one time there will be centres that will be expanding, those that are consolidating and others contracting. An appreciation of the town centre network helps to explain why investment and regeneration in one centre can potentially undermine the vitality of a neighbouring centre. For example, at the time of writing, there is concern in Wembley, Willesden and Golders Green for a proposed mixed-use development with a major retail component in Cricklewood. It is felt that this could adversely affect retail sales of the neighbouring centres and have a detrimental cumulative effect on their vitality.

In the draft SDS a policy of 'Structured Choice' is advocated in an attempt to 'concentrate the supply of retail and leisure facilities and services in the most accessible places and spread them between Central London, town centres and development areas,' (GLA, 2002c p.89). This is related to the notion of the 'Polycentric Approach' favoured in the European Spatial Development Strategy, 1999 whereby the centres around the inner core of London through their public transport linkages, have a major part to play in terms of housing, service provision, employment and leisure. Although this sounds promising in terms of promoting the suburban centres and helping to counter out-of-centre development, from a regeneration point of view, such a policy has to be managed in a careful holistic way. Too much emphasis on one centre as a focus for regeneration could help to undermine another. Currently there is a risk that the major and metropolitan centres will be the main benefactors from any regeneration investment.

## 8.9 Government Policy and Suburban Regeneration

In the Urban White Paper, (DTLR, 2000f p.41) the Government states that; 'We want our towns, cities and suburbs to be places for people – places that are designed, built and maintained on the principle that people come



first. They should contribute to the quality of life and encourage healthy and sustainable lifestyles. They should be places in which we want to live, work, bring up our children, and spend our leisure time. They should be places which promote economic success and allow people to share in rising prosperity, attracting and retaining successful businesses.' This would suggest that the small centres have a key role to play. Furthermore PPG Six on Town Centres and Retail Developments emphasises the significance of a positive plan-led approach to promote development in town centres. Unfortunately as was seen in the chapter six, the use of deprivation indices in regeneration funding bids tends to undermine most suburban regeneration and renewal attempts in terms of gaining additional Government funding. Suburban boroughs like Harrow receive no major regeneration money and consequently have very limited resources for developing plans let alone initiating specific schemes. Furthermore the comparatively low rent returns and atomised patterns of property ownership have meant that few private investors are attracted to the smaller centres. Clearly some change in attitude is needed towards the suburbs in order that they may play a fuller role. The next chapters will demonstrate what is going on and what could be achieved.

## **9. Town Centre Survey**

### **9.1 Introduction to Research**

As has been shown in chapters five and six, London's growing population and subsequent increases in the demand and variety of housing is placing great pressure on the demand for land in the Capital. Between 1997-2016 the four study boroughs will be required to provide an additional 41,950 new homes (GLA, 2002b). They will also need to provide sufficient employment sites, maintain their existing Metropolitan Open Land and meet other land needs. At the same time there is growing evidence that inner city levels of deprivation are developing in some of the once prosperous, aging leafy suburbs; a problem which is being accentuated by the growing population, changing lifestyles and rising property prices.

### **9.2 Current Policy Aims and Latest Research**

Although Government Policy is keen to see improvements to the urban environment for the good of all and is equally enthusiastic to promote sustainable growth by retaining the expanding urban population within the existing centres, The Urban White Paper fails to address a clear role for the suburbs.

The draft SDS (GLA, 2002c pp. 201-205) sees the continued strength of suburban town centres as the key to an inclusive sustainable 'Polycentric' future. Unfortunately over the past thirty years the lion's share of public and private investment has been concentrated in the larger centres such as Harrow, Uxbridge and Watford. At the same time there has been a decline in the level of activity and consequently the significance of many of the smaller centres as they struggle to cope with changes in shopping patterns and growing car dependency. Although the draft SDS wants the boroughs to review their Unitary Development Plans in order to develop spatial strategies for promoting change in suburban centres (GLA, 2002c p. 65), up

to now relatively little work has been done in terms of assessing individual centres.

The first problem has been defining the boundaries of the centres. One recent pilot study in London by the ODPM and CASA, 2002 has for the first time brought together aggregate statistics for turnover, employee jobs and floor space as a means to establish and map boundaries for town centres. It is anticipated that this could be part of an annual review which, overtime, could demonstrate the economic condition of the study centres. The author's meeting with Drummond Robson (One of the consultants on the project) revealed that the survey could be of significant benefit in helping to maintain and improve the level of activity in the established centres by illustrating the levels of demand and the availability of floor space, thereby weakening the case for out of centre developments in urban areas.

However with the exception of this study and an as yet unpublished study by URBED and the RTPI, relatively little work has been done in assessing the condition of London's district and local centres and the way they are coping with change. Furthermore no studies (to the best of the author's knowledge) have attempted to link the changing fortunes of several district and local centres with regeneration and revitalisation in a major city. This work now seeks to address this oversight.

### 9.3 Elements of Primary Research

The next component of the thesis is based on primary research designed and carried out by the author. All land-use mapping, photographs, questionnaire and analysis are original work, carried out during a number of site visits to the twelve selected centres during May and June 2002.

## 9.4 Aim, Objectives and Methodology

### Aim

The aim of the survey is to find out first hand the state of the suburban centres of NWL, to explore their individual strengths and weaknesses and to find out why they have these particular attributes and disabilities.

### Objectives

Broadly speaking the town centre survey has five objectives. The first is to establish how the centres are coping with change. The second is to see if there is any physical evidence of deprivation rippling out from the centre or whether there are any growing local pockets of deprivation. The third objective is to investigate specific triggers which cause change. The fourth is to find the key factors which both help and hinder town centre improvements, and the fifth is to look at the planning policy implications for regeneration and revitalisation in the suburbs.

### Methodology

Based on the historical development of Metro-land twelve district and local centres have been selected in order to explore changing suburbia. Each centre's boundaries are based on the boundaries established in the relevant Unitary Development Plan. They comprise of Wembley Central, Kingsbury, Preston Road, Kenton, South Harrow, Belmont, Rayners Lane, Wealdstone, Pinner, Eastcote, Ruislip Manor and Ruislip.

Although some of these centres existed before the arrival of the railway, they all underwent substantial growth either just before or during the interwar period. Many of these centres and their surrounding housing and industrial estates were the work of speculative builders though not exclusively the Metropolitan Railway. With the exception of Belmont, each centre has retained its railway station, with the Metropolitan, Bakerloo/Silverlink, Piccadilly or Jubilee lines now serving them.

The town centre survey has four components, land-use survey maps, photographs, SWOT analysis and the results of a survey on the expanding private rental sector. Using Ordnance Survey Maps supplied by Edina's Digimap service, an on site land-use survey was carried out by the author for each centre based on the land-use class definitions defined in the Use Classes Order (Town and Country Planning) 1987. Although there is currently a review of the Use Classes Order, it was considered that the 1987 definitions would provide a useful basis for analysing each area. However this was extended to draw out more specific information connected with the viability of the centres, including empty properties and the age of the building stock. The land-use survey was based formally on ground floor level use in order to focus on the level of street activity but all the survey centres have substantial numbers of flats above shops as illustrated by the photographic survey.

The results from the land-use survey have been digitally mapped and coloured to a scale of 1:1250. However in order to fit these maps to the thesis page set up specification, they have been reduced to fit the available A4 page space. The key for the maps is shown on figure 9.2.

The second part of the survey includes a photographic montage which was designed to show the appearance of the centres and to highlight some of the features both good and bad in order to give the reader a visual impression of the each location.

The third part of the town centre survey is the Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. This analysis attempts to provide some qualitative interpretation of the condition of each centre.

The fourth part of the town centre survey is the results of a questionnaire to estate agents assessing the expanding private rental sector. This was developed as a result of the local authorities' housing reports which all

highlighted the poorer quality of the housing stock in the private rental sector. It was mainly designed to see the extent the housing market is being affected by the buy-to-rent investor. The questionnaire and results are shown in the appendices. Although it doesn't automatically follow that all landlords are likely to minimize building maintenance, evidence from Brent and Ealing suggest a strong linkage with inadequate property maintenance and private rental housing, especially in the more marginal problematic areas. Moreover although the expansion of the private rental sector fulfils an essential housing need, the issue of a larger transient population undermining local community networks begins to emerge.

Individually each component of the town centre survey provides an insight into NWL as it stands at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. More significantly, it helps to demonstrate the impact the forces of change are having on the built environment, illustrating a number of the threats and opportunities existing in the area, the unevenness of the ability to adapt by the various centres which in turn could weaken government urban compaction policies.

#### 9.5 Wembley Central

On the face of it, Wembley Central appears to be a thriving, diverse, cosmopolitan centre (Figure 9.1). The land-use survey (Figure 9.3) reveals few empty units and a good mix of retail and business services. There is a significant level of pedestrian activity and the centre is well serviced by bus, Silverlink Trains and the Bakerloo Line. High Street multiples remain including Marks and Spencer, Woolworths, Argos, Boots and Dixons. Banks, building societies, opticians and travel agents are well represented. As older retailers have moved away, the increase in Brent's ethnic diversity has seen the opening up of many new independent traders. The Ealing Road end of the centre in particular has attracted a significant number of jewellery and sari shops for the area's affluent Anglo-Asian community. As a result there are relatively few empty retail units. Indeed it is this growing diversification which has helped to sustain Wembley over the past twenty years.

Fig. 9.1 Wembley Central SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Lively environment
- Wide range of goods & services
- Good communications
- Sustainable centre



### WEAKNESSES

- Poor quality built environment
- Heavy traffic through route
- Lack of attractive centre
- Pedestrian/traffic conflict



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Large diverse local population
- Number of redevelopment sites
- Good communications
- Local community want change



### THREATS

- No long term plan
- Railtrack unwilling to redevelop
- Rivalry from other centres
- Growing deprivation



Fig. 9.2 Land-Use Analysis Key





Fig. 9.3 Wembley Central Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

However there are a number of fundamental weaknesses with the centre. First is the conflict between traffic and pedestrians. The pavements are narrow and roads are badly congested. For thirty years there have been a number of failed attempts to build a town centre bypass with an integrated bus/rail interchange and service road network. The principal problem is the Euston Mainline, which Wembley High Road goes over and the current lack of resources or will power to improve the rundown station.

The second fundamental weakness is the Central Square. Built in the late sixties, the square was originally designed to give Wembley Central a traffic free modern shopping environment which could act as a focal point for the town. However today it has failed to retain any High Street names, it is poorly maintained and feels both an unwelcoming and threatening environment. As of June 2002, Brent Council has approved a scheme to refurbish this area though local people have been highly critical of the proposal.

The third weakness of Wembley Central is that many of the retail units are too small for the storage and service demands of the major chains, service roads are virtually non-existent and personal safety concerns dissuade most visitors from using the substantial multi-storey car park (Community Consultants, 1999 p.7). Fourth, apart from a few restaurants, bars and two gaming arcades, there are no leisure facilities in the centre.

There are five opportunities for Wembley Central. First it is more urban than suburban with a highly diverse entrepreneurial population. Secondly there are a number of redevelopment sites including sites which have been earmarked for a by-pass road. Third recent housing and mixed-use developments have helped to increase the density of the population to more sustainable levels. Fourth the local community's desire for change is finally getting backing from the south of the borough. Fifth the levels of

deprivation have reached high enough levels for Wembley Central to now warrant a separate regeneration funding bid.

In terms of threats to the town centre, Wembley Central continues to slip behind Brent Cross and Harrow. Improvements in those centres continue to undermine the long-term position for a number of the High Street Retailers in Wembley. Moreover new retail developments in Wembley Park, such as the new 20,000m<sup>2</sup> Asda store and the Wembley Stadium Retail Park may mark the start of the 'pull out' from Wembley Central. Furthermore, the continued doubts over the Wembley Stadium Project continues to cast a shadow over any plans for Wembley Central. Indeed Wembley is the only major centre in West London not to attract a mall-type development. One attempt to kick start the regeneration of the High Street was marked by the granting of planning permission in 2001 for a major landmark office building in the hope that it would encourage other developers to look at the area. Unfortunately as Brent's Head of Regeneration observed nothing is going to be built until rents in the area can attract a minimum of £180m<sup>2</sup> instead of the current £120m<sup>2</sup> (Donald, 2002). As it is two of the sixties office blocks in nearby Wembley Park are in the process of being converted into Hotels.

The private rental survey revealed that over the past five years there had been a steady increase in the demand for buy to rent property. Up to 45% of housing was currently being purchased by this sector. The key factor for purchasing in Wembley as in nearly the survey centres was proximity to the station. Both the condition of the property and the local environment were of little value to prospective purchasers.

Overall Wembley Central seems to be slipping further into decline. On the one hand it has excellent communications but the aging infrastructure in terms of both the buildings, railway and road layout are fundamental barriers to any regeneration. On the other hand London still requires centres that can service poorer communities and maybe this could be

Wembley Central's future role. However the centre should still be pleasant, safe and have some sort of leisure facility other than bars and restaurants. Although there have been several attempts at devising a local strategic plan, a more concerted attempt needs to be made which is adequately funded, doesn't rely on a single developer-led scheme and most significantly addresses the weaknesses of the local road system.

#### 9.6 Kingsbury

Kingsbury is a district centre on the Jubilee Line and is representative of the later developer built centres of the interwar period (The old village of Kingsbury was to the south east) (Figure 9.4). The recent extension to the Jubilee Line has helped to further improve the centre's good public transport connections to the rest of London. The land-use survey (Figure 9.5) reveals that Kingsbury has only one empty retail unit, better than any of the other centres in the study. Although linear in nature with a busy major road running through it, it has the benefit of very wide pavements which helps to separate pedestrians from the traffic. Kingsbury has a reasonable range of goods and services which is dominated by independent Anglo-Asian Traders. There are some High Street names including Boots, Woolworths, Blockbuster Videos and Aldi. To the south there has been an attempt to develop a service road and small parking area which has helped both visitors and businesses. As a result, despite there being three major supermarkets within a mile, the centre remains viable and vibrant. A further strength of Kingsbury is the proximity of the popular Kingsbury High School and the opening in September 2002 of the new Jewish Free School.

The major weaknesses in Kingsbury include the heavy through route with the resultant pedestrian/traffic conflict and all day commuter parking in the side streets. Kingsbury's location in Zone 4 of the Underground, good road accessibility and free on-street parking makes the station popular with commuters from further out of London. Unfortunately there is little evidence to suggest that the commuters bring any economic benefits to the centre.

Fig. 9.4 Kingsbury SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Reasonable range of goods & services supported by diverse population
- Good public transport
- Well maintained streetscape



### WEAKNESSES

- Heavy traffic through route
- Some pedestrian/traffic conflict
- All day commuter parking
- Limited local entertainment



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Reasonably well maintained environment
- Potential for more restaurants and neighbourhood facilities
- Could increase local housing density to increase local demand



### THREATS

- Only limited objectives in UDPs
- Rivalry from Harrow, Brent Cross Shopping Centre and retail parks along Edgware Road
- Complacency





Fig. 9.5 Kingsbury Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

A further weakness of Kingsbury is that leisure and cultural facilities are limited to a few bars and restaurants, a small private gym and a park.

In terms of opportunities, the reasonably well-maintained environment, diversity and vibrancy could prove attractive for new investment especially in terms of additional housing. Although there is some concern that the area could lose up to 9.31% of its population during the next 15 years (Partners for Brent, 2001 p.18) due primarily to the aging population, there are some sites which could provide additional smaller housing units. There have also been plans, for over twenty years, to redevelop the site of the former Kingsbury Pool as a leisure and cultural centre.

In terms of threats changing lifestyles could undermine the present vibrancy of the centre. One of the reasons why Kingsbury is still so busy is through the continued support of the local shops and services from older residents and females from the Anglo-Asian Community, who are at home during the day. In many respects their continued support of these facilities is more reminiscent of the original suburbanites with their daily shopping patterns. However, increased mobility among this female population and falling numbers of the older residents could have a significant impact on the existing vitality of the district centre. Although Kingsbury has managed to consolidate its hierarchical position in the face of intense competition over the past ten years, the changing lifestyles of the population present an inherent weakness in terms of its long-term future role in London. This has been largely ignored by the revised draft Brent UDP (2002) which lacks any clear policy for revitalising the centre.

The private rental sector survey revealed that up to 30% of all housing was being purchased by this sector but a shortage of sufficient small properties and flats was suggested by one estate agent as a reason why the figure wasn't greater.

For Kingsbury to continue to play an important role both for the local community and within the London area, a long term plan is needed which addresses the area's declining population and counters the centre's potential diminishing significance. Such a plan would need to consider ways of maintaining or increasing current levels of street activity, providing more higher density accommodation and the benefits of a leisure/entertainment complex. Without a plan the centre and neighbourhood could decline in a similar way to Wembley Central with rising levels of deprivation in the future.

### 9.7 Preston Road

Preston Road is a successful local centre on the Metropolitan Line (Figure 9.6). Originally farmland, the shopping centre and neighbouring housing estates were a product of the speculative builders, namely Costin and Wimpey. Parts of the neighbouring Preston Park and Barnhill Estates have been designated as Conservation Areas.

Among the strengths of Preston Road is the availability of good public transport links, an appropriate range of shops and services for a local centre, including a library, restaurants and cafes. The land-use survey (Figure 9.7) reveals that out of the 95 retail and business units only 3 are vacant. With the majority of the flats above shops occupied and a number of recent housing intensification schemes nearby Preston Road is a vibrant local centre.

There are four weaknesses with the centre. The first is the lack of a central communal focal point other than the station, the second is the busy traffic, the third is the all day commuter parking and the fourth is the poor state of the pavements and signage.

In many respects, the good communications and diverse population could be the basis for a revitalisation programme. However this would need to



Fig. 9.6 Preston Road SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Successful local centre
- Reasonable range of goods & services
- Good communications
- Well supported by local people



### WEAKNESSES

- Poor quality state of walkways street signage and shop fronts
- Busy traffic through route
- Lack of attractive centre
- All day commuter parking



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Diverse local population
- Nearby housing redevelopment opportunities creating potentially larger local demand
- Good communications



### THREATS

- No long term plan
- Rivalry from other centres and supermarkets
- Growing deprivation
- Deteriorating environment



Fig. 9.7 Preston Road Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

involve the redevelopment and intensification of some of the existing housing stock.

There are four potential threats to the centre. First, the centre has been under growing competition from the more successful centres like Harrow and the new supermarkets in nearby Kenton and Wembley Park. However its relative distance and the recently extended opening hours from a number of traders has helped Preston Road to consolidate its position. The second major threat has come from the growing levels of local deprivation with a mixture of an aging local population and a significant number of people being re-housed in the private sector during the rebuilding of Brent's sixties housing estates at Chalkhill and Stonebridge. The private rental survey revealed that 62.5% of properties were being purchased by buy to rent purchasers, the highest result in the survey. Indeed the third threat to the centre is the growing transient population of short-term overseas workers. In particular the area is very popular with Japanese City workers and their families. Although this can create a very cosmopolitan feel, the loss of permanent residents can see the fragmentation of local networks and the erosion of the sense of local identity. In view that local identity is considered to be one of the strategic advantages of centres in suburban London, the absorption of once owner-occupied housing into the private rental sector and the expansion of a transient population is beginning to undermine this role other than a purely geographical association. The fourth threat comes from the lack of a specific strategy for the Preston Road's long-term future in both the adopted and emerging Brent Unitary Development Plans. With more pressing priorities elsewhere in the borough, the centre has suffered in terms of streetscape maintenance and improvements.

Despite facing growing competition from nearby supermarkets, Preston Road has up to now successfully managed to consolidate its position as a local centre in NWL. However unless steps are taken to revitalise the centre

it could potentially begin to fail. Current UDP policies simply want to maintain the centre. However more is needed. A community led strategy needs to be developed and ultimately implemented which combines short-term improvements to the streetscape, car parking and provision of improved community facilities with long term development goals.

#### 9.8 Kenton

Until the 1980s Kenton was a district centre but over the past ten years has been down graded to local centre status (Figure 9.8). The land-use survey (Figure 9.9) reveals a centre in decline with 20% of shop units vacant, the majority of which are in the former prime shopping parades. Furthermore large numbers of retail units have been converted into offices.

Kenton is a classic interwar semi-detached suburb built around the Silverlink and Bakerloo line station. Its strengths include a reasonable range of services, wide pavements and the benefits of a 1990s streetscape improvement scheme which included new paving, parking bays, tree planting and quality street furniture.

There are five fundamental weaknesses with Kenton. First it remains on a heavy through route, secondly the neighbourhood has a diminishing aging population (-8.9% by 2016 Partners for Brent, 2001 p.18). Third its proximity to Harrow and the position of the new Sainsbury's supermarket in relation to the town centre, with its car park set some distance from the centre, has fundamentally undermined the vitality and viability of the centre despite streetscape improvements paid for by a section 106 agreement. Fourth, Kenton is located in both the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow. This has historically hindered strategic decision making for the town centre. The fifth fundamental weakness with the centre is the large numbers of empty retail units especially in the centre of the main parades which give a feeling of abandonment.

Fig. 9.8 Kenton SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Benefited from improvements to streetscape in late 1990s
- Reasonable range of goods & services
- Good communications



### WEAKNESSES

- Heavy traffic through route
- Failing centre – has been downgraded to local centre
- Loss of retail activities
- Over dominance of supermarket



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Good communications
- Well maintained
- Potential to become entertainment centre
- Redeveloped at higher density



### THREATS

- No long term plan
- Dominance of one supermarket
- Rivalry from other centres
- Aging local population





Fig. 9.9 Kenton Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

In terms of opportunities, the good communications and street improvements have resulted in the Councils promoting the transformation of Kenton into an entertainment centre. The area also has the potential to be redeveloped at a higher housing density given that a number of the properties adjacent to the centre have very large gardens.

The major threats to the centre's long term future is the rivalry from nearby Harrow, the over dominance of one supermarket, the aging population, the growing transient population and the lack of a long term plan.

The private rental survey revealed that 25% of properties were being sold to buy-to-let purchasers and that both the proximity to the station and the quality of the local environment were key issues for investors. In part this figure is comparatively low due to the lack of small flats and houses in the area.

In many respects Kenton, despite a reasonably pleasant suburban environment, illustrates the damage that can be created through a more affluent, car dependent lifestyle. Unlike neighbouring Kingsbury, local people have largely abandoned the high street shops of Kenton. It demonstrates perfectly how not to include a major supermarket in a town centre both in terms of its location and orientation and the timing of the development. The low to medium density housing with its aging and falling population will continue to undermine the vitality and viability of the centre. Moreover the growing number of short-term overseas workers will further accelerate the deterioration in community wide networks and therefore the sense of local belonging. For the Kenton to continue to play a role in London's Town Centre network a Masterplan needs to be prepared and instigated illustrating an increase in local housing densities and a means to overcome the barrier issue between the supermarket and the main centre.

## 9.9 South Harrow

South Harrow is a reasonably successful district centre on the Piccadilly Line (Figure 9.10). At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was an industrial area with a gas works but from the 1930s a direct tube service to Central London opened up the area to the speculative builders. Today the land-use survey (Figure 9.11) reveals that South Harrow has a reasonable range of shops and services including two supermarkets and a covered market which are well supported by local people and workers. There are a number of purpose built office buildings, a library and medical centre. The land-use survey found only four empty units of which three were being parcelled for redevelopment. With good public transport, a few cafes and bars the centre remains both viable and vibrant.

There are four weaknesses with South Harrow. First it is linear in nature with no central focus. Second, there are a number of key junctions along the centre resulting in the main shopping area (Northolt Road) being both busy and congested, creating several pedestrian/traffic conflict hot spots. Third, although there have been some cosmetic improvements to the centre, it still appears faded, needing further improvements to signage, seating and meeting areas. Fourth with the exception of a private gym, and the library, the centre has few leisure facilities.

The diverse mix of employment, retail and service activities makes this quite a vibrant centre servicing an extensive neighbourhood. There have been a number of recent attempts to increase housing density, though there is further potential to expand. The local community, led by the South Harrow Residents Association, are eager for improvements.

There are three major threats to South Harrow. First there is Harrow with its diverse range of shops, services and entertainments. Secondly, the older smaller traditional housing stock has reached the time for expensive maintenance works. Furthermore concerns exist for the build quality of



Fig. 9.10 South Harrow SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Reasonable range of goods & services for district centre
- Still vibrant despite presence of two supermarkets
- Good public transport



### WEAKNESSES

- Busy traffic through route
- Some pedestrian/traffic conflict
- No central focus
- Limited local entertainment



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Room to improve streetscape and signage
- Potential for more restaurants and entertainment facilities
- Could increase local housing density to increase local demand

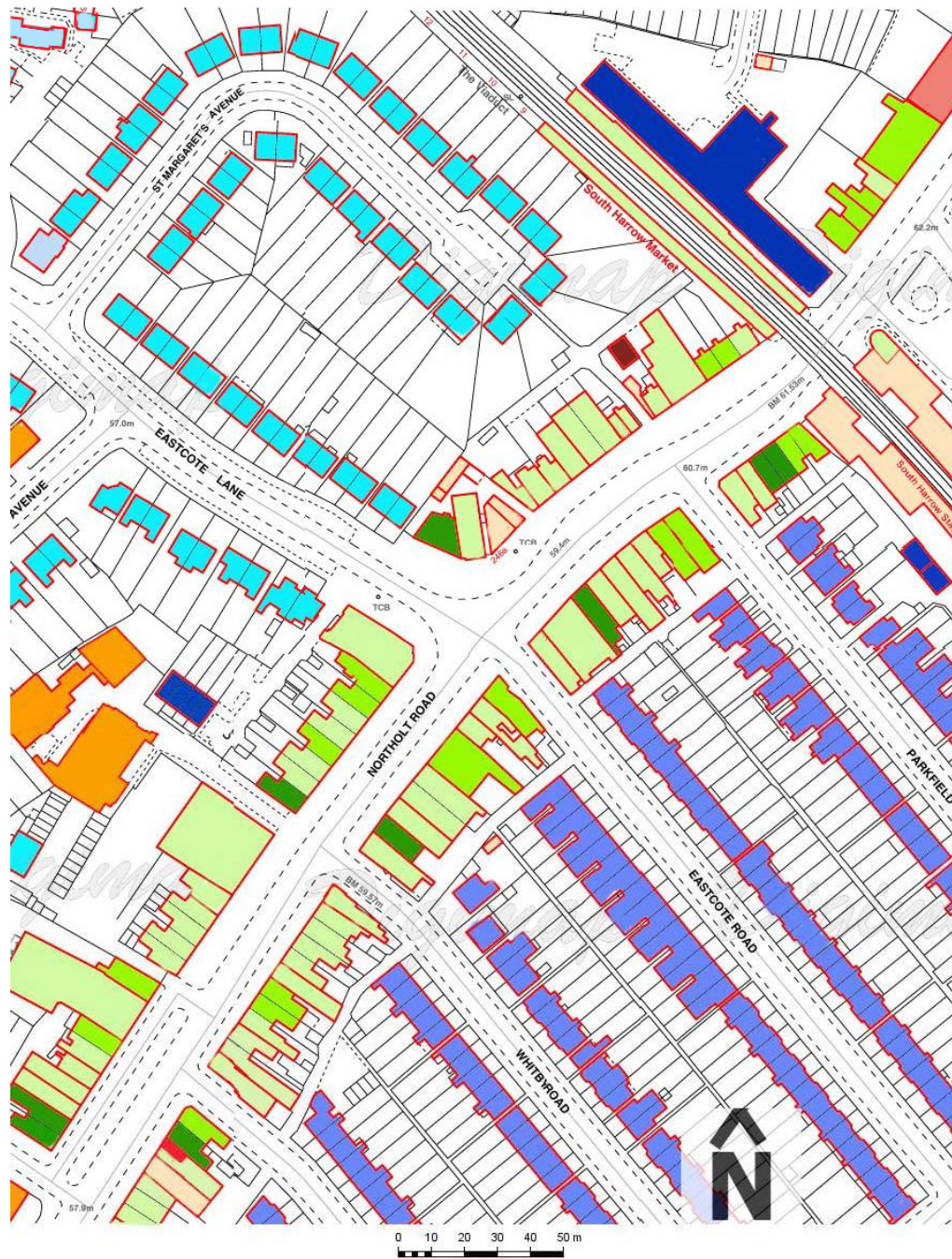


### THREATS

- Only limited objectives in UDP
- Rivalry from Harrow
- Aging environment
- Complacency



Fig. 9.11 South Harrow Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

much of the local interwar housing stock. Third the emerging Harrow UDP, has only standard town centre objectives.

The private rental survey revealed that 28% of properties were purchased by this sector. The area was favoured because of the tube station and the relative affordability of the housing.

In many respects South Harrow remains vibrant, proving that it is possible to successfully integrate two supermarkets into a district town centre. Moreover it has a number of varied employment opportunities. This in turn has helped to maintain a strong sense of local identity of the type desired in the draft SDS. Interestingly though, South Harrow falls between regeneration and revitalisation. In many respects there is potential to increase housing provision, and improve the physical environment and range of services in the centre. This would help the centre to retain its district centre status. However the neighbourhood has an aging population and by Harrow standards there are a number of pockets of high deprivation. Furthermore some of the aging housing stock needs attention which poorer residents can't afford and there is a local requirement for extra help for people looking for employment. Consequently following the action of councillors and the South Harrow Residents Association, the centre and surrounding poorer neighbourhoods will receive some small regeneration initiatives (Claire Codling, 21/6/02). Overall South Harrow is a useful focus for broad based regeneration, with the forthcoming developments enabling local residents to share the benefits of the urban renaissance.

#### 9.10 Wealdstone

Wealdstone is a district centre located by Harrow and Wealdstone Station which is served by Silverlink and the Bakerloo Line (Figures 9.12). The ancient village was heavily extended during late Victorian times. It became a significant industrial area which grew with the arrival of the Kodak factory in the 1930s. To help accommodate both factory workers and commuters



Fig. 9.12 Wealdstone SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Has been given new lease of life due to new bypass road (1996)
- Good public transport
- Recently improved streetscape
- Good range of goods & services



### WEAKNESSES

- Rivalry from Harrow
- Some pedestrian/traffic conflict
- Less affluent neighbourhood
- Limited local entertainment



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Reasonably well maintained environment
- Some sites suitable for redevelopment
- Could increase local housing density to increase local demand

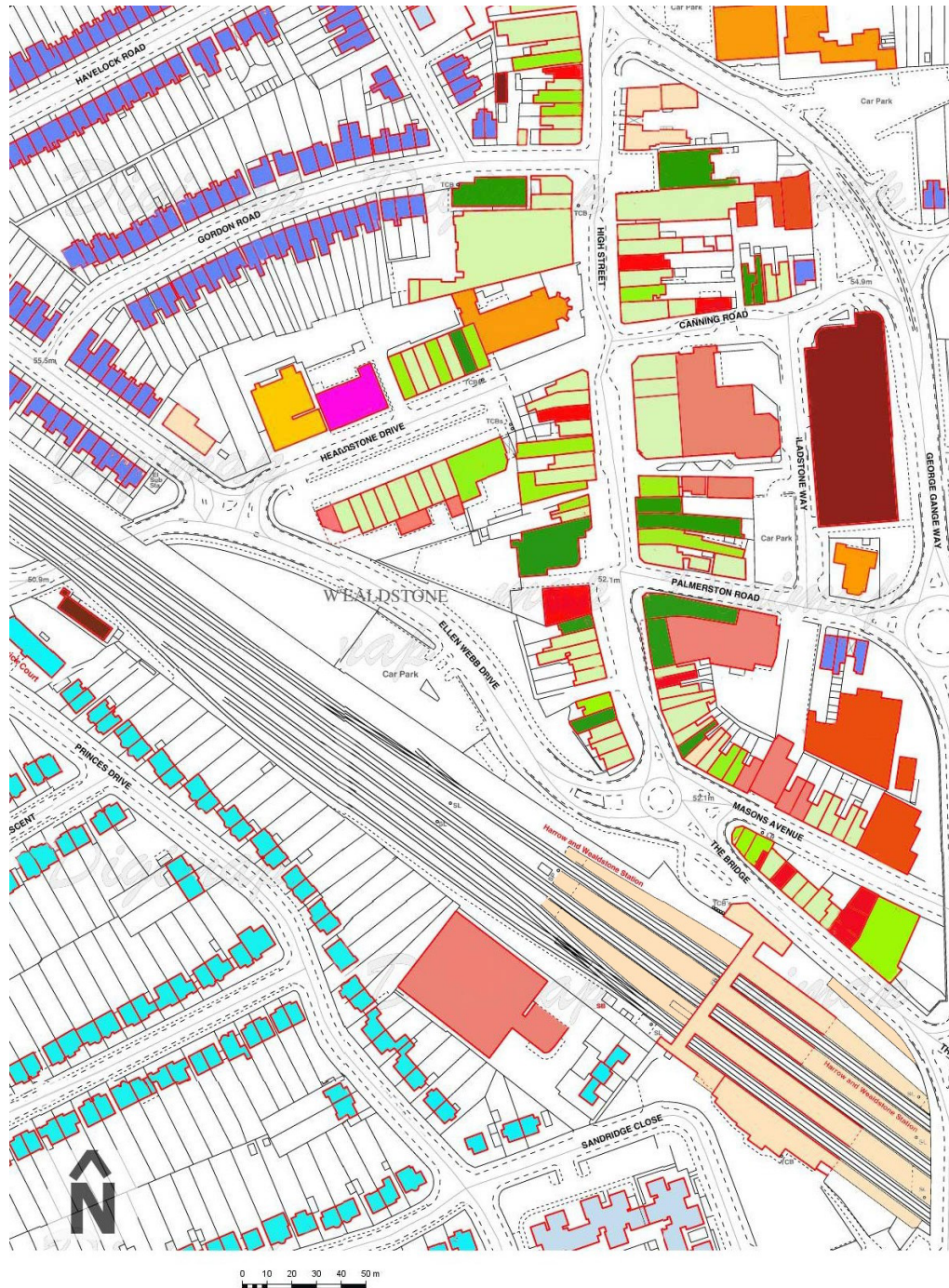


### THREATS

- Following town centre regeneration strategy now only limited objectives in UDP
- Rivalry from Harrow
- Some of borough's worst deprivation found locally



Fig. 9.13 Wealdstone Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

the Princess Housing Estate was built in the 1930s. Changing fortunes and lifestyles, meant that by the 1980s Wealdstone was in serious decline and since 1988 has been the focus for Harrow's main regeneration scheme.

The opening of the George Gange Way (bypass road) in 1996 has helped Wealdstone to re-establish itself as a district centre. The bypass and traffic calming schemes coupled with improvements to the streetscape including new paving, seating, signage and lighting as well as the development of a small town square by Trinity Church has helped to give the centre a new lease of life. The land-use survey (Figure 9.13) reveals a centre with a good range of shops and services including a library, medical centre, youth centre. Nearby there is a modern public leisure centre with swimming pools and sports facilities. Currently the railway station is undergoing a £4m refurbishment programme and the council has just received central government funding for a street warden for the next three years. Moreover there are a number of community-based initiatives including WAC (Wealdstone Active Community), which carries out home improvement schemes for poorer people, runs a community forum and communal activities such as an annual festival and 'Blooming Wealdstone' Competition.

The fundamental weaknesses in the area are the relatively high levels of deprivation in terms of income, housing and child poverty. Housing in particular is among the worst 5% of housing in England. The less affluent neighbourhood has made it a less attractive proposition to investors with both Asda and Sainsbury's scrapping plans to locate stores in the area after extensive preparations.

In terms of opportunities, the centre has a number of sites which lend themselves to be redeveloped as live/work units. By adopting a sympathetic design the 'village' feel of the area could be developed and maintained.

There are four main threats to the centre. First is the threat from neighbouring Harrow as a service provider, potentially undermining the recent achievements in Wealdstone. Secondly a number of the regeneration schemes have run their course and will require some form of exit strategy. Third, although the area has some deprivation problems, the centre remains well supported by local people and workers, giving it vibrancy. If the centre became too trendy there is a threat that a more affluent population will turn the area into an up-market coffee shop environment. At present, a balance has been struck between the need to improve the locality whilst retaining and servicing the daily needs of the existing population. This impetus needs to be maintained.

The private rental sector survey revealed a fourth threat to the centre. Partly due to Wealdstone's fast train links to Central London and the availability of small more affordable homes (Compared with neighbouring areas), 50% of properties are currently being purchased by the buy-to-rent sector. If this continues at this level, it could potentially harm the regeneration attempts in the long term.

The achievements in Wealdstone demonstrate the significance of smaller town centres as foci for regeneration. By re-invigorating and developing their urban identity to create vibrant, safe and pleasant places, people from the neighbouring area, who had abandoned the centre, may return to visit. The rediscovery of an inclusive civic pride and good publicity of schemes such as the WAC programme, can, as has been demonstrated, result in an overall improvement to the neighbourhood, encouraging suburbanites to stay and benefit from the urban renaissance.

#### 9.11 Rayners Lane

Rayners Lane is a district centre on the Metropolitan/Piccadilly Lines (Figure 9.14). The area is home to the Harrow Garden Village developed by the Metropolitan Railway with ES Reid to the north and TF Nash to the south.



Fig. 9.14 Rayners Lane SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Benefited from recent improvements to streetscape
- Reasonable range of goods & services
- Good communications



### WEAKNESSES

- Heavy traffic through route
- Failing district centre - 17% of shop frontage vacant
- Few people using facilities
- Limited local entertainment



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Good communications
- Reasonably well maintained
- Redevelopment sites in centre
- Potential for higher density residential accommodation



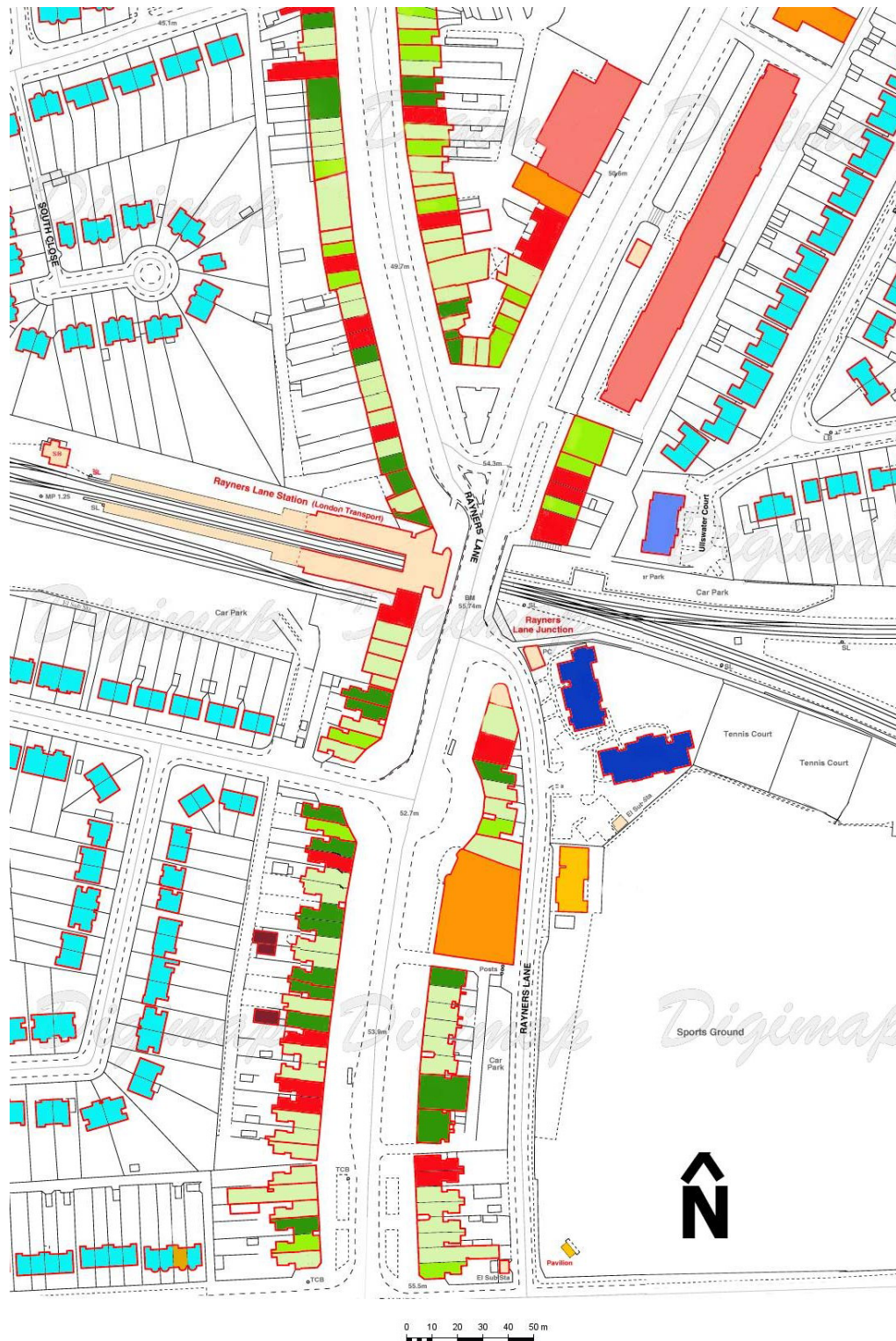
### THREATS

- Only limited long term objectives in UDP
- Rivalry from better facilities in Harrow and Uxbridge
- Funding holding back change





Fig. 9.15 Rayners Lane Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

The main strength of the Rayners Lane is its good communications including a designated cycle route, a reasonable range of shops and services and wide pavements.

There are five fundamental weaknesses. First it is a heavy through route, which effectively splits the centre in half. Secondly the land-use survey (Figure 9.15) reveals that it is a failing centre with 17% of retail units empty. This has resulted in parts of the centre having a bleak, uncared for appearance despite attempts to improve the streetscape. Third there are comparatively few people about. At first this was thought due to the low density semi-detached housing but a closer area wide investigation revealed that in addition to the flats above the shops there are significant numbers of 1930's flats within a few minutes walk. Fourth apart from a run down library, a sports field, a few bars and takeaways, Rayners Lane has very limited local entertainment. The old Essoldo Cinema was turned into a Zoroastrian Centre during the 1990s. Fifth the centre has failed to attract any large supermarket unlike the majority of neighbouring district centres.

In terms of opportunities, there are a few sites which could be developed into mixed-use schemes with a higher density housing component.

It appears that the nearby centres of Harrow and Uxbridge coupled with the supermarkets in South Harrow and Pinner are a constant threat to a recovery in Rayners Lane. Unlike Kingsbury, local people have largely abandoned the centre. Although there have been attempts to retain some on-street parking to attract passing trade, Rayners Lane is missing out. Moreover there are growing pockets of deprivation in the neighbouring Strongbridge Estate. More disturbing is the lack of a plan to revive the centre.

The private rental sector survey revealed that 25% of homes are purchased for rental. In part this is due to the good transport links and the availability

of flats along Imperial Drive. The quality of the local environment was not an issue as far as purchasers were concerned possibly reflecting the negative impression Rayners Lane portrays.

Rayners Lane is a suburban centre that needs to redefine itself. Currently it is the least vibrant district centre in the survey. Apart from a Woolworths, a Londis and a Thresher Wines there are no other High Street names. There is a distinct shortage of community and leisure facilities. With the growing levels of deprivation in the neighbourhood, the centre could prove a useful focus for regeneration initiatives. However any attempts to reverse the decline through a major redevelopment would need to be considered in the context of the impact on neighbouring centres.

#### 9.12 Belmont

Belmont is a late 1930s local centre which was built adjacent to the route of the Stanmore Rattler, an over ground rail service which ran between Harrow and Wealdstone and Stanmore Abbey (Figure 9.16). All services were withdrawn in the early sixties and track subsequently removed. Since then the centre has only been serviced by bus. Prior to the Second World War the area had been developed by Manor Homes but after the war a substantial public sector housing estate was built comprising of small blocks of flats and maisonettes.

The land-use survey (Figure 9.17) shows a centre with a reasonable range of shops, cafes and takeaway restaurants. It has a small Tesco Supermarket, a modern medical centre and a community centre. There are no other employment sources in the immediate vicinity.

The fundamental weaknesses with the centre include the lack of a rail link, the condition of the community centre, the higher levels of local deprivation and the 12% vacancy level of the retail units.

Fig 9.16 Belmont SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Isolated local centre
- Essential shops & services only
- Good medical centre
- Basic but successful community centre



### WEAKNESSES

- Poor quality state of walkways street signage and shop fronts
- Busy traffic through route
- Lack of attractive centre
- No direct rail link with City



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Diverse local population
- Nearby housing redevelopment opportunities creating potentially larger local demand
- Potential to re-open railway



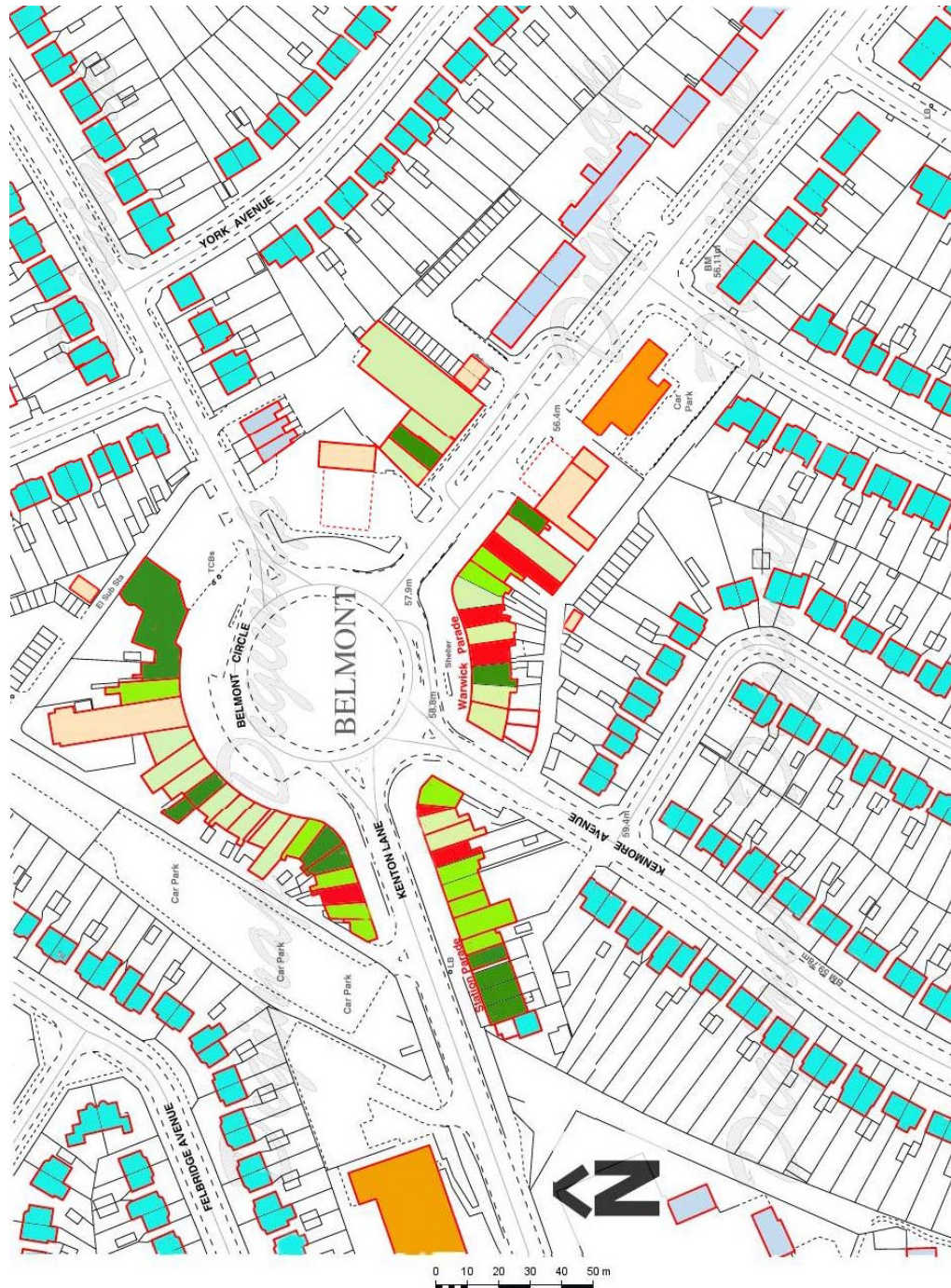
### THREATS

- No long term plan
- Rivalry from other centres
- Growing deprivation
- Deteriorating environment





Fig. 9.17 Belmont Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

The private rental survey revealed that only 15% of homes were purchased for rent. This is not surprising in view that the centre doesn't possess a station.

The growing diversification of the population presents an opportunity for some of the empty units to re-open as specialist suppliers. However one of the major opportunities is if the rail service could be re-instigated as a light rail link. This would potentially revitalise the centre which at the same time could become a focus of regeneration for this neglected corner of NWL. The run down community centre could be redeveloped as part of a mix use development and some of the housing with the larger gardens could be redeveloped at a higher density.

In many respects there are no new threats to the Belmont. It has been relatively neglected (with the exception of the medical centre) since the 1960s. However in many respects it represents the large number of centres across the London suburbs which are not connected to the tube or rail systems. Although there are attempts to increase the level of bus provision and reduce fares for the needy, these centres remain relatively isolated, just like a remote village in the countryside. In some respects isolation keeps them vital to the local community, especially to those members without transport. However with more cars and new supermarkets and retail parks being opened, the days of these centres could be numbered.

#### 9.13 Pinner

Pinner is a district centre served by the Metropolitan Railway. It is the most affluent centre in the survey built around an historic village core which forms part of a Conservation Area (Figure 9.18). In 1885 it became one of the first locations to be chosen by the Metropolitan Surplus Lands Committee for the construction of substantial suburban housing.

Fig. 9.18 Pinner SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Most affluent district centre
- Very good range of goods & services
- Good public transport
- Well maintained streetscape



### WEAKNESSES

- Busy traffic through route
- Some pedestrian/traffic conflict
- Limited local entertainment
- NIMBY element



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential for more restaurants and entertainment facilities
- Could increase local housing density to increase local demand



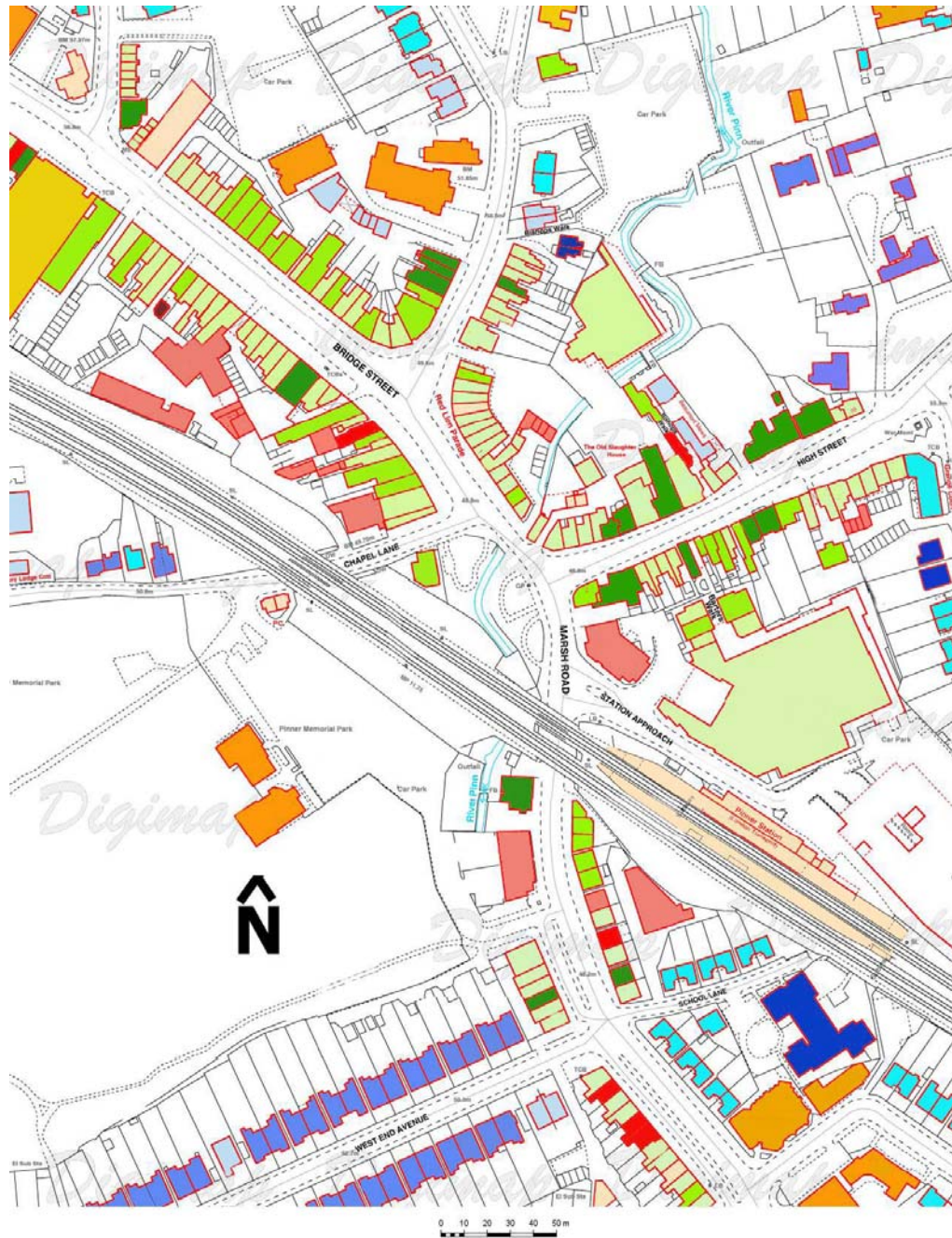
### THREATS

- Only limited objectives in UDP
- Limited rivalry from Harrow, Watford and Uxbridge
- High land prices could undermine local businesses





Fig. 9.19 Pinner Land-Use



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Today Pinner is a reasonably busy centre with the land-use survey (Figure 9.19) revealing a diverse range of shops and services, few empty units, some office employment and a wide range of community services. Its village centre remains an attractive focal point for the town. Even the new Sainsbury's Supermarket and the Marks and Spencer Store have been carefully incorporated into the centre so as not to undermine the amenities of existing facilities.

The weaknesses include the busy through route which creates some pedestrian traffic conflict, limited local entertainment and the NIMBY element which becomes very active with any development proposal. Furthermore its ethnic mix is not representative of NWL which weakens the vibrancy of the centre.

There is some scope for more leisure facilities and the potential to redevelop some sites to provide more housing. On the whole in terms of retaining the character of the area any development would have to be highly sympathetic.

For the foreseeable future there don't appear to be any major threats to Pinner with only limited rivalry being posed by Harrow, Uxbridge or Watford. The one potential threat is the high land prices which could undermine local businesses and put off new people from moving into the area. This potentially could make the town more expensive and diminish its role as a district centre.

The private rental survey revealed that 25% of properties were purchased by predominantly local people to rent. The condition of the property and the local environment were considered vital considerations since the demand for local rental property came from individuals and companies who could afford to be selective.

From a regeneration point of view, although the centre is relatively low density the integration of housing with large and small shops, the balance between open spaces and focal points, the sense of civic pride among its inhabitants with its diverse range of communal facilities and activities are all features that could benefit other less affluent communities.

#### 9.14 Eastcote

Originally a small village, the arrival of the Metropolitan Railway and subsequent development during the 1930s by Manor Homes has resulted in a linear townscape (Figure 9.20). Eastcote is well served by the Metropolitan and Piccadilly Lines with good access to Central London, the City and Uxbridge. The land-use survey (Figure 9.21) shows a centre with a diverse range of shops and services including a number of restaurants, a well-stocked library, medical centre and businesses including Bellway Homes. There has been some recent mixed-use development close to the station. The shopping centre is tree lined with flowerbeds and has some front service road parking areas. Above the shops are flats with separate access. Out of 103 retail units only 8 are empty. Overall the town centre feels reasonably vibrant.

There are four weaknesses with the centre. First it is linear in nature with no focal point. Secondly there is a lack of local entertainment other than pubs and restaurants. Third the area has an aging population which although supportive of the local centre is diminishing. Fourth the changing lifestyles of the people moving into the area with their longer working hours and both partners working suggests that Eastcote could be starting to change.

Eastcote has the potential to become a more significant centre in Hillingdon. There are some development opportunities and the existing pleasant environment with its range of restaurants and basic facilities could form the

Fig. 9.20 Eastcote SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Pleasant & safe environment
- Reasonable range of goods & services
- Good communications
- Few empty units



### WEAKNESSES

- Linear centre with no focal point
- Lack of local entertainment apart from restaurants
- Needs long term role



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Good communications with City, Harrow and Uxbridge
- Potential to become more significant centre
- Some housing redevelopment at higher density possible



### THREATS

- No strategic long term plan apart from UDP comments
- Rivalry from other centres
- Aging local population
- Complacency



Fig. 9.21 Eastcote Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

basis of a revitalisation programme where local housing densities could be increased and economic viability of the centre improved.

The private rental survey revealed that only 15% of properties were purchased by the buy to rent sector despite the availability of plenty of flats and a good train service.

The major threats to Eastcote's long-term role include the recent shopping and leisure facility provision in nearby Uxbridge, its aging population and the lack of a long-term strategic plan. Indeed as Ron Dane (14/6/02) revealed to the author, all regeneration programmes in the London Borough of Hillingdon are being targeted at the former industrial centres of Hayes and West Drayton in the south of the borough. As a result there is no capacity to look at ways of improving the local centres in the north of the borough.

#### 9.15 Ruislip Manor

Like neighbouring Eastcote, Ruislip Manor is well served by the Metropolitan and Piccadilly lines. Overall the local centre has changed little in the past forty years (Figure 9.22). Indeed it was part of the 1914 Northwood-Ruislip Town Planning Scheme referred to in chapter three. Although linear in nature, the Land-use survey (Figure 9.23) reveals a mixture of housing types, community facilities, small shops and offices. The main streets are tree-lined and well maintained.

Apart from a library and a few cafes and bars, leisure facilities are limited. The linear nature of the centre along the busy (at times) Victoria Road could be seen as a weakness but the wide pavements and the provision of seating areas helps Ruislip Manor to retain some village like qualities. However the land-use survey reveals that there are a significant number of empty units in the heart of the main shopping parade and that there are no High Street names present.



Fig. 9.22 Ruislip Manor SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Attractive minor centre which is product of Northwood-Ruislip Town Planning Schemes (1914)
- Reasonable public transport
- Well maintained streetscape



### WEAKNESSES

- Limited entertainment facilities
- Linear pattern means no central focal point
- Significant number of empty units in central shopping parades



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential for more restaurants and neighbourhood facilities
- Could increase local housing density to increase local demand
- Could benefited from ethnic diversification



### THREATS

- Only limited objectives in UDP
- Rivalry from Uxbridge, Harrow, and retail parks along Victoria Road
- Complacency



Fig. 9.23 Ruislip Manor Land-Use



(Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

Ruislip Manor's good communications provide an opportunity for the centre to play a more significant role in London. Some mixed-use development with some additional housing provision in the centre, if done sympathetically, could help the centre to gain a new lease of life.

The Sainsbury's Supermarket in nearby West Ruislip, the retail park along Victoria Road, the wider range of shops and services in Eastcote, Ruislip and Uxbridge are all threats to Ruislip Manor. Any improvements would have an impact on these neighbouring centres. Furthermore the private rental sector survey reveals that 25% of properties are being purchased by the buy to rent sector mainly due to the relative affordability of some of the smaller properties and the station. This is a recent phenomenon and so the impact is only small at the moment. However the fundamental threat to the centre is the lack of a strategic plan for future development despite the tell signs of empty units and low pedestrian activity. However the controlled expansion of this centre could provide extra homes in a sustainable way.

#### 9.16 Ruislip

The final study centre is Ruislip (Figure 9.24). In 1904 the Metropolitan Railway arrived to the south of the historic village. By the 1930s the countryside had started to be transformed into suburbia only to be largely stopped by war and the green belt.

Today Ruislip is an affluent district centre like Pinner. The land-use survey (Figure 9.25) reveals a High Street with few empty units and where there have been a number of housing developments, some additional shops and offices and a new Waitrose Supermarket. The centre is well served by the Metropolitan and Piccadilly Lines. Furthermore there is a bus interchange at the station. However one of the most appealing features of Ruislip is its proximity to the countryside and the wide variety of country pubs and pursuits.



Fig. 9.24 Ruislip SWOT Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Affluent district centre on edge of London & greenbelt
- Good range of shops & services
- Good integrated public transport
- Well maintained streetscape



### WEAKNESSES

- Busy traffic through route
- Some pedestrian/traffic conflict
- Limited local entertainment
- NIMBY element



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Some potential for more Restaurants and entertainment facilities
- Could increase local housing density to increase local demand



### THREATS

- Probable closure of local Ministry of Defence sites
- Hillingdon's regen focus on old industrial areas to south (Hayes & Yiewsley) (Understandably)
- No long term development plan



Fig. 9.25 Ruislip Land-Use



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Despite these facilities and the quality of the local environment, the private rental survey reveals that less than 10% of homes for sale are being purchased by the buy-to-rent sector.

One of the key weaknesses of the centre is the unsympathetic impact some of the more recent developments are having in terms of scale and design. There is also the issue of the centre being a junction for a number of busy through routes.

Although a large part of the town is a conservation area, there are opportunities to re-develop a few sites.

In terms of threats, the improved shopping and leisure facilities in Uxbridge could undermine the long-term position of some of Ruislip's retailers. However the single biggest threat to the long-term future of the centre is the lack of a clear plan. Already a substantial block of flats has been built by the station and another has been built towards the centre of the town. These both tend to dominate Ruislip. A clear planning brief would help to encourage more sympathetic development whilst at the same time encouraging a growth element. Indeed in terms of location, by the station with links to the City, Uxbridge and Heathrow Airport, the centre could benefit from some controlled growth. This would enhance the vitality of the centre and its long-term viability.

#### 9.17 Conclusion

By adopting such a comprehensive research approach a picture has begun to emerge showing the condition of the smaller centres of NWL, the diversity of forces affecting them and the relation with their neighbourhoods and neighbouring centres. Chapter ten continues with the analysis

## **10. Analysis of Town Centre Survey**

In following the thesis aim of finding ways in which planning can generate strategies which can bring the benefits of the urban renaissance to suburbia, this chapter analyses the findings of the town centre survey in terms of the five survey objectives.

### **10.1 Condition of the Centres**

The first goal of the survey was to assess the condition of the centres. Overall the majority of the smaller centres appear to be holding their own providing essential products and services for their communities. Some like Pinner and Eastcote have consolidated their position, others like Kingsbury have benefited from an influx of small businesses and new communities who continue to support the local facilities in a more traditional way as described in chapter eight. However some centres like Rayners Lane have both failed to retain customers and to attract new investment, resulting in a steady decline. Kenton on the other hand has suffered from a new supermarket being inappropriately located in relation to the town centre resulting in an almost complete loss of pedestrian activity along the traditional shopping parades.

Wembley Central is not only the largest centre in the survey but remains the most challenging in terms of regeneration. The rising levels of local deprivation, traffic congestion, poor maintenance, inadequate design of the shop units and service areas and lack of community facilities combine to make a strong case for a more concerted effort at achieving the regeneration of this still important district centre.

However Wealdstone demonstrates what can be achieved when a local council decides to be more proactive in giving a once problematic smaller centre a new lease of life. The road and streetscape improvements, the development of community links and help for those on low incomes with housing maintenance, are aiding both the centre and the local area to

regenerate. Such efforts are both sympathetic to the needs of the local community and realistic in terms of what is achievable within the confines of the changing expectations of retailers and developers.

## 10.2 Study Centres and Deprivation

The second objective was to see if there was any evidence of deprivation rippling out from Inner London or whether pockets of deprivation were expanding. This was considered important in the overall aim of the thesis in terms of the timing and type of intervention planning could adopt in the suburbs.

In NWL there is evidence to suggest that the innermost centres in North Brent are seeing rising levels of deprivation especially in Wembley Central. This can partly be explained by the decanting process which has been going on during the rebuilding of the sixties council estates and which will come to an end by 2005. However the scale of this process combined with the expansion of the local private rental sector and the overall growing population is having a fundamental impact on the neighbourhood. On the one hand, with more people moving into the locality, the area is becoming more vibrant, but on the other it is resulting in significant levels of overcrowding and an overall deteriorating environment. Based on this evidence and despite the two recently approved schemes, it is clear that Wembley Central needs a strategy which can manage both the overcrowding and the inadequacies of the existing infrastructure and built environment. Since Wembley feels the most urban of the study centres it could be deduced that a high density mixed use developments could be appropriate for the centre if it gains support from the local community.

The study also revealed that there are pockets of deprivation in the local neighbourhoods of Wealdstone and Rayners Lane. Furthermore the author considered that the neighbourhoods of Belmont and south of Ruislip Manor are also showing signs of physical deterioration and are potentially at risk.

From a planning point of view, action now could prevent the situations further deteriorating.

### 10.3 Triggers of Change

The third survey objective was that in order to develop clear suburban planning strategies an appreciation of the triggers of change, which affect local centres, is necessary. In NWL these appear to be changing population, changes in the retail and entertainment sectors, the expanding private rental sector and Government Policy.

The first is the changing population. Much of this was discussed in chapter five but broadly speaking in the areas served by the inner centres, the population is both expanding and growing younger as more people move into the area. At the same time a number of the outer centres are seeing their populations age and slightly fall. This has three principle effects on the centres and their surrounding neighbourhoods. First in the growth centres the growing population has increased demand for housing and in particular for smaller more affordable units. Secondly in the growth centres there is a growing requirement for more services especially in the areas of education and entertainment. As a result, there is increased pressure to develop any available land including marginal sites such as playing fields, former hospitals and public houses. The third effect can be seen in the suburban centres which have a slightly contracting, aging population. This would suggest a growing under utilization of land and local resources. Over time these areas could become increasingly more suited for some densification of housing. However no doubt, local homeowners will be keen to protect their interests and the amenities they enjoy.

The second trigger is the changes in the retail and entertainment sectors. The need for larger units with adequate servicing facilities has encouraged a number of High Street names to leave or simply avoid, the smaller centres preferring instead to go to the major centres or the new retail parks and

shopping malls. Although PPG6 may advocate the adoption of a 'sequential approach' to large retail developments and more recently a requirement to prove a 'need' for the store, in the case of NWL, the arrival of large supermarkets locating in the smaller suburban centres, has met with mixed results. In Pinner and South Harrow, the supermarkets have helped the centres to continue to thrive but in Kenton the supermarket has accelerated the centre's decline through its poor location and linkages with the older shopping parades. However one promising development has been the growing number of small and medium sized enterprises, especially from the ethnic minorities, which have helped a number of the centres like Kingsbury to remain viable.

In terms of entertainment, all the centres have a significant number of restaurants and takeaways and these have helped many of the centres to remain vibrant. However the development of multiplex cinemas in major centres and out of centre locations has meant that none of the study centres have their own cinema. On the other hand several of the centres have retained their libraries but many of the community facilities apart from those in Pinner and Wealdstone are in need of updating.

The third trigger of change is the expanding private rental sector. As growing numbers of properties move into the rental sector, especially in the centres where property is both close to the stations and more affordable, there is, in the case of poorer neighbourhoods, the risk of an overall deterioration in the local housing stock as landlords minimize maintenance programmes. Furthermore the shortage of accommodation in the public/RSL sector will result in increased levels of overcrowding and as a result in higher levels of deprivation in some locations. The problem is that many of these sites in the centres are precisely the locations which could be redeveloped to offer better quality, higher density accommodation.

The fourth trigger of change is Government Policy. Despite talk of an urban renaissance, Central Government and the GLA remain primarily concerned with the challenges and issues which face Inner London and London's position as a World City. Even the draft SDS has very little to say specifically on the suburbs. Moreover in terms of regeneration funding and neighbourhood renewal, in 1998, the Government decided to allocate 80% of the SRB challenge fund to the 65 worst wards in the country (DETR, 1998). As a result there is only limited funding available for other less badly affected communities such as those in NWL. (See Tiesdell and Allmendinger, 2001). The irony is that the Government and the draft SDS want to keep the expanding population of cities and especially London within its boundaries and that to achieve this the suburbs need to be included as locations for building at higher densities. Unfortunately despite the requirement of the draft SDS for the boroughs to develop clear plans for 'promoting areas around suburban town centres as appropriate for higher density and mixed-use development where public transport and accessibility allows [and] for improving the access, public realm and maintenance of suburban heartlands' (GLA, 2002c p.65) as yet no additional resources have been mentioned or mechanisms to help achieve this suggested.

#### 10.4 Regeneration Successes and Failures

In terms of developing successful planning strategies for the suburbs one important lesson from the study is to compare the relative success and failure of different suburban regeneration and revitalisation projects. Much of Wealdstone's success can be attributed to the sustained all party support for the scheme since the 1980s. The need to have a supportive Council is vital for the success of any such programme. The failure of Wembley Central to achieve any improvements demonstrates the damage that can follow when political support is missing.

Community involvement is another significant factor in suburban planning. In Pinner the activity of various community groups has helped to ensure



that most developments in the centre have been appropriate in terms of scale and design. The local community has also benefited from a recent community hall. However the actions of NIMBY groups could undermine potentially beneficial schemes. In Wealdstone local traders, fearing loss of through traffic trade, needed much persuasion to support the construction of the bypass road.

However the other extreme in regeneration terms has been the developer led schemes in nearby Brentford. Although working to the Brentford Development Plan, during the past ten years the area has been radically altered through a series of large-scale developer led schemes. As a result of the scale of the physical developments and the number of new residents, local people have begun to feel increasingly alienated. Consequently in the May 2002 elections, three local councillors lost their seats to Community Candidates on an anti-regeneration platform.

Furthermore even with political, community and professional help, things still go wrong. Despite valuable improvements to the streetscape and a new road paid for by a Section 106 Agreement, Kenton continues to decline. Part of the problem lies in the location of the supermarket but also there was a failure to fully appreciate the impact of the new shopping and entertainment developments in nearby Harrow. Indeed the interconnectivity of centres and the overlapping of market areas is an important consideration in any town centre regeneration attempt.

However all these schemes highlight the need for any physical regeneration town centre scheme to have realistic goals which are well designed and integrated into the existing centres both in terms of scale and character, which are well supported by the local community and council and are achievable by the developer.

### 10.5 Planning Policy Implications for Suburban Regeneration

Since current policy proposals are encouraging suburban centres with good transport connections to have higher density housing and mixed-use development, there are two issues which need to be addressed, first would this type of development be appropriate for NWL and secondly how would such development affect the neighbouring areas?

Many of the study centres with their already built transport links and aging buildings provide an opportunity for densification. Work by Llewelyn-Davies (2000) and Rudlin and Falk (1999) suggest a number of ways of increasing housing density whilst improving the quality of the built environment. Although some form of densification is possible, to date none of the study centres have devised clear strategies for this kind of development. Most development in these smaller centres appears organic, as in the case of Ruislip, where the recently built flats at Kings Lodge and The Thomas More Building, whilst providing higher density accommodation, appear unduly dominant and relate poorly to the traditional townscape. Indeed what is often missing in many new schemes is an appreciation of the need for new development to be sympathetic to the prevailing character of the local vicinity. In particular the significance of how urban or rural a suburban centre and the surrounding area may be, generally appears to have been overlooked in terms of design and suitability of a scheme. This issue will be returned to in chapter eleven.

### 10.6 Conclusion

In terms of project objectives the town centre study has revealed the importance of developing planning strategies which are appropriate for both the centre and local neighbourhood. Although many suburban residents may work away from the area, for the majority, the suburbs remain their home and any unsympathetic development will be seen as a threat. Higher density housing and land-usage may be a policy goal which intends to spread the urban renaissance but for many suburbanites it will set alarm

bells ringing. The question now is how, given London's growing population, can this be achieved?

## **11. Towards a New Approach to Suburban Planning**

### **11.1 Introduction**

By returning to the original thesis hypothesis that planning continues to fail the suburbs, the evidence so far suggests that the suburbs of NWL are considered a minor issue as far as planning is concerned. However many suburbs have been undergoing fundamental social, economic and demographic changes over the past twenty years. This has been demonstrated through the changing fortunes of NWL's centres and their surrounding neighbourhoods. Some areas like Ruislip and Eastcote have changed little from their traditional leafy image but others like Wembley are suffering from progressive deprivation and decline.

### **11.2 The Suburbs and the Draft SDS**

Despite planning's relative failure to look at the suburbs as a unique entity which needs special attention, the draft SDS expects the suburbs to play their part in accommodating London's overall growing population and growing number of households. Indeed there appears to be an element of desperation in trying to find ways to manage the changes whilst maintaining London's status as a 'World City'. Some like Edwards and Budd (1997) have already questioned the benefits World City status has for local people and businesses in London. However it is the failure to demonstrate an adequate appreciation of suburban issues and the formation of a strategy which fails to mediate between the concerns of local people and metropolitan needs, which is of concern in this thesis.

### **11.3 The Relation of Centres with Neighbourhoods**

The research in the preceding chapters has shown that the relative success or weaknesses of local suburban centres can in part be seen as symptomatic of the neighbourhoods they serve. Hence the importance of these centres as foci for regeneration and revitalisation is crucial. By bringing together the condition of the centres with measures of

neighbourhood pocket deprivation, a mechanism could be developed which would provide a means for targeting regeneration funding into suburban areas which hitherto have been excluded. It is anticipated that the ONS and GOL could provide the means to achieve this aim.

#### 11.4 Urbanism and Rurality

However of equal significance in terms of future policy is the relative degree of urbanism or rurality in different suburban areas. Some areas have a very urban character; others are more like villages, with the majority somewhere in between. As shown these centres are changing and in a number of cases are becoming increasingly urban. In such centres, clear objectives and plans need to be established which bring the benefits of development and improved services to an area and not simply inner-city problems. In declining centres like Kenton, clear strategies need to be established which either reverse the decline or restructure the area by contracting the centre whilst retaining sufficient services for the local population. Similarly the maintenance of more rural villages within the suburbs could be highly significant in terms of retaining local people rather than seeing them migrate out of London through over development. Indeed the earlier migration section has shown the way people continue to migrate out of NWL to other parts of the UK often to neighbouring market towns and villages, thereby putting greater pressure on recipient areas' local resources (See Champion et al, 1998 and Breheny, 1999b for national analysis).

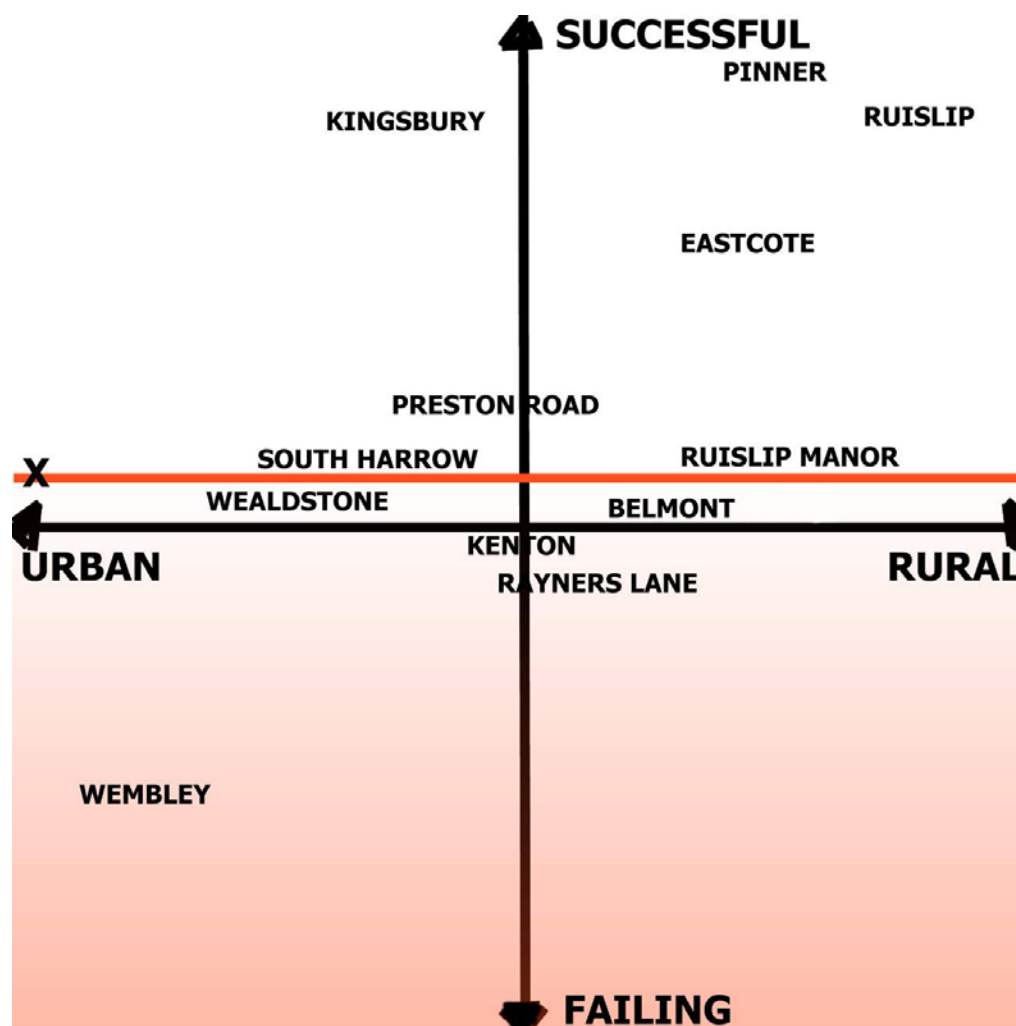
#### 11.5 Linking Suburban Character and Centre Condition

By plotting a measure of urban/rurality with the condition of the centre (See figure 11.1) it should be possible over time to see how centres are first changing both in terms of their condition and their character and secondly how they may be responding to specific socio-economic forces and policies. By tracking the changing fortunes of different centres and their neighbourhoods it should be possible to spot the time for the enactment or

withdrawal of regeneration or revitalization measures. The area for action could lie everywhere below line X.

This idea is purely an attempt to encourage planners and policy makers to take another look at the suburbs and to identify the factors which contribute to change. Although such an approach will be highly complex in quantifying measures of success and whether a centre is more urban or rural, this is primarily an attempt to introduce a means to escape from traditional inner urban and rural approaches.

Fig. 11.1 A New Look at Changing Suburbia



The device is an attempt to develop specific strategies for suburban regeneration. Its great strength will lie in the ability to see how the suburbs are changing over time. Apart from showing condition it will show how the character of the suburbs is changing and whether they are becoming increasingly urban. By seeing these developments emerging it should, resources permitting, be possible to plan for improvements to transportation facilities, additional education and health facilities and the quality of the area's built environment.

#### 11.6 Centre Changes and Time

Moreover by plotting these centres over time it should also be possible to see the impact improvements or decline in one area is having on a neighbouring area. Although there are tools such as the sequential approach, these are considered to be relatively crude when considering the wide spectrum of effects changing area fortunes can have in terms of demographic profiles, employment opportunities and housing and service demand.

Similarly the mechanism could help to identify locations where there are weaknesses in terms of specific facilities, services and transport linkages at the regional level. Investment in certain sectors such as education or health could be the key to seeing an overall improvement to an area and at the same time relieve pressure on neighbouring resources.

By looking at the suburbs in this way, a new agenda could be established which combines the character of an area with change over time. It could be used to measure the relative success or failure of different forms of regeneration or revitalization by the public, and/or private sectors and to test whether the benefits of the urban renaissance are spreading to the suburbs. By achieving this, it could help to develop more effective strategies for both the local and regional levels.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS

Unlike earlier works on the suburbs this thesis has, by looking at the public transport suburbs of NWL, linked the issue of regeneration and revitalisation of district and local centres as a way to bring the urban renaissance to the suburbs. Until now this has been a neglected field partly as a result of the urban myth that all is well in the leafy suburbs, partly due to the very serious levels of deprivation that exist in the inner city and partly by the failure of Government to realise that the suburbs are as unique an entity as the inner city or rural areas.

### 12.1 Hypothesis Result

In many respects, the original thesis hypothesis that 'Planning continues to fail the suburbs' is largely confirmed as far as NWL is concerned. Although the interwar suburbs were in part based on the ideas of architects and town planners, the introduction of urban containment policies was very much a backlash to the progress of the free market and the social changes which suburbia helped to unleash. Since then, planning in NWL has been largely reactive to emerging situations. With a few exceptions, there have been only limited attempts to develop proactive strategies aimed at seeing long-term improvement.

However the combined effects of urban containment and the economic and societal structural changes during the past twenty years has had, as this thesis demonstrates, a profound effect on the suburbs. Changes in employment, the way the retail and entertainment sectors have developed and increased car-dependency and resultant congestion have had a significant impact on the ageing built environment. Although the larger centres of Harrow and Uxbridge have evolved with extensive reconstruction, centres like Wembley and Rayners Lane have in many respects been 'left behind'.



## 12.2 Current Situation

In terms of population, the area attracts significant numbers of new residents. Household sizes remain slightly larger than those of Inner London, as would be expected with the more affordable housing/space costs. The largest percentages of younger households remain in Brent. However there remains a definite outward migration of population from NWL. This not only puts pressure on recipient regions in terms of housing demand and other resources but through the replacement of NWL's population with a more transient fragmented population; local networks and concern for the area are being undermined.

In terms of deprivation, twenty years of council housing becoming the housing of last resort has resulted in many of the sixties and seventies estates becoming areas of high deprivation. In Brent, the tower and bison block estates have been large enough to register at the ward level and thereby attract significant levels of neighbourhood renewal investment. However the smaller estates of Harrow, although possessing similar problems to Brent, are too small to benefit from neighbourhood renewal funding. Only in the declining industrial areas have Harrow and Hillingdon managed to attract any SRB type funding.

The current scale of social housing redevelopment in Brent has contributed to the outward expansion of higher deprivation into the suburbs as generally low-grade more affordable older housing is used to accommodate displaced residents and newcomers. As a result original residents have been moving away from the area. This has culminated in Wembley Central and Alperton having among the worst housing conditions and overcrowding in England in 2002.

Part of the problem with the deteriorating housing stock is the expansion of the private rental sector. Evidence from Ealing and Brent has shown that this sector has a disproportionate amount of unfit housing. In view that the

buy-to-rent sector has become a significant component of the housing market over the past five years in parts of NWL and that there is a shortfall of new build completions, the overall quality of the housing stock is set to decline further as more landlords cut back on maintenance programmes, especially in the more problematic areas. More significantly from a regeneration point of view, much of this housing is in areas closest to the train stations. The fragmentation of ownership and tenure could slow down any regeneration attempts whilst contributing to an overall deteriorating environment.

### 12.3 Towards a new approach

This thesis urges the adoption of a new objective approach to planning and the suburbs. There would be two elements to this process comprising of a research agenda and revised roles for existing institutions.

In terms of research, a methodology needs to be established to help unravel the complex regional suburban networks which link the suburbs with their centre and surrounding areas. A second element would need to investigate the way local centres within suburbia connect with their neighbourhoods and with other centres. Indeed as shown in this thesis, local centres are one of the few tangible mechanisms which can help as foci for targeting resources into the suburbs. A third element will need to consider ways current planning policy can be developed to address suburban issues. Evidence from the case study of NWL suggests that much of the existing planning is for the most part attempting to maintain the status quo, by attempting to fend off inappropriate developments instead of looking to the future.

In view of the emerging rising levels of deprivation rippling out from the centre and local pocket deprivation, planning in the suburbs needs a new proactive approach. This would need to go beyond current land-use based approaches requiring instead a more holistic view involving housing,

education, training and medical services. Equally, employment and business development would be a major consideration in terms of the opportunities and prosperity it can provide individuals and local communities. Resources permitting, such comprehensive strategies could be achieved at the local level.

However, it is becoming increasingly evident that in terms of regenerating and revitalising the suburbs, there are fundamental weaknesses in using boroughs to plan for the suburbs (e.g. Brent's political unwillingness to bring improvements to Wembley Central). The scope of the issues and the interdependency of centres beyond the borough level, especially when considering education and medical services, suggests that a regional approach could be more appropriate. Indeed as far as obtaining European regeneration funding is concerned, a co-ordinated regional approach is essential.

In London the use of the Government Office for London to devise a renewal strategy and English Partnerships to help co-ordinate plans could be a way forward which the draft SDS currently fails to appreciate.

A key element to any successful regional strategy in suburban London is the network of local centres. It is at this level that a balance can be struck between the needs of the region with those of the local communities. Effective individual strategies need to be developed with clear long-term objectives including comprehensive design frameworks for integrated centre and neighbourhood renewal. These would need to address such issues as the degree of 'urbaness' and rurality and could have a profound effect when designing sympathetic mixed-use densification schemes. For example, new schools could be built into housing schemes and improved community facilities could help social networks to evolve. If designed and maintained well, new schemes could be seen as an asset and may, with better social integration, help to stem the outward migration from the area. At the same

time, through the regional dimension public transport and especially the tube network could be improved with more cross linkages among the different centres helping to reduce car dependency.

This thesis started with two quotes one from John Betjeman reflecting the past and another from Deyan Sudjic looking to the future. An appreciation of the past with an eye on the future is vital if we are going to embark on a successful journey to regenerate and revitalise the suburbs.

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## Appendix 1 Estate Agent Survey

In April and May 2002 a survey was carried out in a sample of twelve local and district centres in NWL of estate agents to find out what was happening to the buy-to-rent sector in the area. In all but 1 centre three different firms of estate agents were asked to fill out a questionnaire. In Belmont, there were only two estate agents. Consequently 35 different firms were contacted in total.

The aim of the survey was to see if the buy-to-rent sector was expanding and to see what percentage of homes were being bought by this sector.

Question 1 found that in all cases the respondents confirmed they had seen an expansion of the market over the past five years.

Question 2 showed the proportion of properties being purchased by private investors. The following results were achieved

Belmont	10
Eastcote	10-20
Kenton	25
Kingsbury	30
Pinner	20-25
Preston Road	62.5
Rayners Lane	25
Ruislip	5-10
Ruislip Manor	25
South Harrow	30
Wealdstone	50
Wembley Central	45

Questions 3 looked at the make up of the investors and found that in NWL individual and families dominate the rental market.

Question 4 found that most investors live locally.

Question 5 showed that the most favoured property for purchase were flats mainly because they were more affordable and they also offered the fastest rate of return.

Question 6 considered if buyers who had other properties were buying close to their existing investments i.e. same street. The general response was that it didn't really matter though most purchasers preferred the properties to be local so they could keep an eye on them. However in Wembley Central, Preston Road and Ruislip Manor there were cases of individuals buying up large sections of residential streets.

Question 7 was concerned by the condition of properties. More often than not, the investors weren't as concerned as homebuyers.

Question 8 attempted to find which facilities were most important to prospective buyers.

8a – Number of rooms was in some respects a mistake since most investors bought what they could afford, though two bedroom flats were the preferred option.

8b – Proximity to station was a must in all but one case (Belmont – no station).

8c Car Parking was only of average importance.

8d Local facilities was generally of average importance.

8e The significance of the local environment was a minor issue in the more problematic areas and of more importance in the affluent areas like Pinner.

Overall this survey demonstrated that the buy-to-rent sector was expanding and that in more problematic areas there was a risk over time that a growing proportion of properties would move from owner-occupier into the rental market. Given the track record of some landlords it looks as though the housing in some areas will deteriorate further.



**Estate Agent Survey**

- 1). Compared with five years ago, do you think there has been an increase in the buy to rent market?
  - a). Yes
  - b). No
  - c). The same
- 2). What percentage of purchasers of domestic property buy to rent today?
- 3). Are the buyers of rental property?
  - a). Individuals
  - b). Companies
  - c). Families
- 4). Do the buyers of rental property live locally?
  - a). Yes
  - b). No
  - c). 50-50%
- 5). What sort of property is most favoured?
  - a). Purpose built flats
  - b). Houses
  - c). Conversions
  - d). Property to convert
- 6). Generally do buyers with other properties prefer to have the properties close to existing places they own i.e. same street?
  - a). Yes
  - b). No
  - c). Doesn't matter
  - d). Don't know
- 7). How much does the condition of the property matter to prospective buy to rent purchasers compared with individual homebuyers?
  - a). More significant
  - b). The same
  - c). Less significant
  - d). Don't know
- 8). What are the main considerations for buy to rent purchaser?

- |                            | Very important | Average Importance | Not Important |
|----------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| a). Number of rooms        |                |                    |               |
| b). Proximity to a station |                |                    |               |
| c). Car parking            |                |                    |               |
| d). Local facilities       |                |                    |               |
| e). Local environment      |                |                    |               |

## Appendix 2 Questionnaire for Professionals

1. Where are the borough's main regeneration projects (especially physical)?
2. From your experience what are the principle problems faced by suburban-based regeneration projects?
3. How would the polycentric regional approach favoured in the London Plan affect the London Borough of Harrow? What effect would this have on the smaller local centres?
4. Do you think the suburbs could benefit from a citywide suburban regeneration policy?

These questions were designed in order to obtain a broad range of responses the information of which has been included in the thesis.